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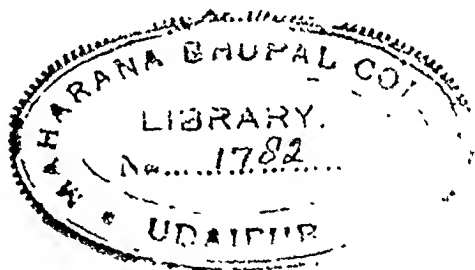
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PIERRE LOTI

STORIES FROM PIERRE LOTI

Translated
by
LAFCADIO HEARN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Albert Mordell



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INTRODUCTION

PIERRE LOTI, like Maupassant, was first introduced to English readers by Lafcadio Hearn in the pages of New Orleans newspapers, in the eighties of the last century. Loti stirred Hearn to greater depths of enthusiasm than did any other author. In him Hearn found a writer who had literary tastes similar to his own, an artist who carried out his own artistic theories successfully. Baudelaire did not experience a more uncanny feeling when he discovered a fellow spirit in Poe than did Hearn when he first read Loti. He intended for a number of years to translate completely both novels of Loti that captivated him so strongly, "The Marriage of Loti" and "The Romance of a Spahi", but he did not do so, apparently for want of encouragement from publishers. He translated more passages from the latter novel than he did from any other work of Loti. He never lost his enthusiasm for these two early books of Loti, preferring them to the later, more popular novels. He did not agree with Henry James who placed "My Brother Yves" and "The Iceland Fisherman" above them in literary merit.

He wrote to his correspondents, particularly Basil Hall Chamberlain, glowingly about these books. He discussed Loti with Chamberlain fervently and persuaded him to read Loti. When he learned that Loti's early works did not move Chamberlain as deeply as he thought they should, he wrote: "Neither our De Quinceys nor

our Coleridges nor our Byrons could have written such things—prose more poetical than all English poetry—prose more luminous and penetrating than Tennyson's best verse."

He expatiated in a similar strain to other correspondents and told them of the great influence that Loti had upon him. To Krehbiel he wrote: "No writer ever had such an effect upon me: and time strengthens my admiration. I hold him the greatest of living writers of the Impressionist School: and still he is something more—he has a spirituality peculiarly his own, that reminds you a little of Coleridge. I cannot even think of him without enthusiasm." Hearn adopted Loti's theories in descriptive writing. In his essay "The Most Original of Modern Novelists", Hearn described his own method of work while detailing that of Loti: "On visiting a new country he always used to take notes of every fresh and powerful impression—a landscape,—a sunset-blaze,—a peculiar atmosphere,—a singular and typical face,—a moral trait,—an architectural eccentricity,—a bit of picturesqueness in custom,—a barbaric strain of music,—using his artistic knowledge of color or music with technological accuracy." "Chita" and "Two Years in the French West Indies" are in Loti's style. Hearn admitted that Loti inspired him to write the sketch "Torn Letters" (collected by the present editor in "An American Miscellany").

There were several reasons for the great reverence in which Hearn held Loti. Loti was partly a Romantic and an Impressionist, dealt with tropical scenes, had a

fine sense of color, was interested in folk-lore and folk-songs and wrote tales of love affairs between people of different races. Naturally all this appealed to Hearn. But we must not forget that Hearn had Loti's tendencies before he read him. In some qualities such as descriptive power, he even surpassed Loti. But he was so modest that he did not put himself in the same class with Loti. He worshipped him, treasured every scrap of his writing, opened a correspondence with him and asked for his portrait. Later, after Loti became a member of the French Academy, he treated Hearn somewhat formally, writing to him, much to Hearn's disgust through a secretary.

From 1880 to 1887 Hearn made over twenty translations from Loti for two New Orleans papers and wrote at least four lengthy editorials about him, the first articles on Loti in English.* I have collected these masterpieces of literary criticism in "Essays in European and Oriental Literature". Incidentally, they help us to understand Hearn the artist.

Hearn apologized for Loti's lack of moral feeling in his work, on the ground that perceptions of a physiological nature must be sensitized before the moral sense can be successfully developed. But he could no more conceive of Loti erring in his physical impressions than he could think of a film on a photographic plate doing so. For him, Loti had looked into "Nature's whole splendid,

* "A New Romantic", "Times-Democrat", September 23, 1883; "The Most Original of Modern Novelists", December 7, 1884; "Plot-Formation in Modern Novels", August 22, 1886; "'The Nation' on Loti", March 13, 1887.

burning fulgorant soul", and had "written under her very deepest and strongest inspiration." He admitted, however, that Loti dealt with the surface of life and was not psychologically profound.

Hearn's judgment on Loti is nearly always sound, though he did not agree with the usual view that "The Iceland Fisherman" was Loti's masterpiece. Loti's account of life in the tropics are as great as anything we have in literature of this nature. Melville's "Typee", which was a predecessor of Loti's "The Marriage of Loti", is probably a greater work, but it does not surpass it in vividness of colorful scenes. The African pictures in "The Romance of a Spahi" are as exquisite as those of the Island of Tahiti. Fortunately, Hearn has translated some of these African scenes, as well as those in another favorite book of his "Propos d'exil". Hearn also thought highly of "Fleurs d'ennui", a work that I believe has not been translated into English, and he gave two selections from it to the readers of the "Times-Democrat".

Hearn translated passages from most of Loti's books that appeared in the eighties, but sometimes from newspapers and periodicals before Loti collected the articles in book form. He translated passages from the two famous novels "My Brother Yves" and "Iceland Fisherman", as well as sketches that were collected later in "Japoneries d'automne", a work that has never been translated into English. We see, therefore, that this volume contains a number of translations from Loti that have never before appeared in English.

Two of the important translations Hearn made from Loti are "The Capture of Tonkin" and "The Massacres of the Annamites", which originally appeared in "Le Figaro". The severity of his criticism of the French forces for their barbarous warfare in Indo-China during the fall of 1883,—of which Loti was an unwilling eye-witness—cost him his position in the navy for a year. Loti did not collect these articles till many years later, in 1898, in "Figures et Choses", and then he toned them down. (This volume appeared in English under the title of "Impressions" and had an introduction by Henry James.) We are therefore fortunate in having the sketches here now for the first time in book form, as Loti originally wrote them.

The longest sketch in this volume "Fragments From My Diary" calls for special attention. The "Times-Democrat" made an announcement prior to the publication of the sketch that Lafcadio Hearn had been successful in obtaining an original manuscript of Loti. When it appeared in December, 1884, Hearn proudly placed at the top of the four column article the words "Translated from the Original Manuscript" and signed his name as translator at the conclusion—something he did not do in his other translations. Hearn was in correspondence with Loti at the time and succeeded in obtaining the sketch for a good monetary consideration. It was a "scoop" for it had never been published before. It was part of Loti's diary begun when he embarked on "The Atlante" in May, 1883, to go to Indo-China, to partake in the attack of which he did not approve. Loti's

biographer, Edmund B. D'Auvergne, who apparently found the translation among Loti's papers, says that this diary "in some mysterious manner" found its way to Hearn, not realizing that Hearn bought it for the newspaper. Auvergne has also ventured to call the translation one of the worst pieces of English he had ever read and he took the liberty of amending a very small passage he quoted in his book! Let the reader judge for himself.

Auvergne thought rightly however that the sketch was originally intended for publication. What must have happened was that Loti could not or did not want to publish it at the time he wrote it, and that he grasped at the opportunity of selling it a year and a half after it was written. It was originally longer, but Hearn omitted some parts on account of newspaper space limitations. We have, therefore, in this volume a sketch by Loti that (as far as I know) has never before been published in French.

Another sketch also calls for comment. After Hearn went to the West Indies, he came across a sketch called "Le Reve" in a French newspaper, where it was copied from the original in the "Fortnightly Review". The piece moved him intensely. He later translated it and sent it to Miss Elizabeth Bisland for her magazine; but she apparently did not use it. When he went to Japan, he sent a rough translation to the "Japan Mail" where it was published. Loti included this sketch in his "A Book of Pity and Death", a work which was translated by T. P. O'Connor.

This volume should be a delight to both lovers of

Hearn and Loti. It constitutes probably the most important translations Hearn ever made: it is assuredly a close rival to the translations of Gautier's "One of Cleopatra's Nights" and of Flaubert's "The Temptation of St. Anthony". It is superior to his translation of "Le Crime of Sylvester Bonnard" which was a piece of hack-work and to the translations from Maupassant with whom he was not so much in sympathy as he was with Loti.

Loti's fame, it is true, has suffered somewhat of an eclipse since he died nine years ago. Possibly he was not as great a writer as his disciple and admirer—Hearn. He deserves however to be resuscitated. He was not a mere Romantic, as Hearn thought; he was an artistic realist, for he wrote of scenes he witnessed of emotions he felt and of people he knew. He differed from the realists only in one respect;—he laid his scenes in foreign lands and wrote about people of other nationalities.

May 1933.

PHILADELPHIA

ALBERT MORDELL

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A LOVE-MATCH IN TAHITI

A LOVE-MATCH IN TAHITI

From "LE MARIAGE DE LOTI."

"*The New Orleans Democrat*", October 17, 1880.

THE court of Pomare was decked for reception the day I first placed my foot upon Tahitian soil. The English admiral of the *Reindeer* had made his official visit to the Queen, an old acquaintance of his; and I had accompanied him in full dress.

The thick verdure sifted the rays of the ardent sun; it was 2 o'clock in the afternoon; everything was still and motionless in those shadowy avenues which form Papeete, the city of the Queen. The huts with their verandahs, scattered through the gardens, under the tall trees, under the huge tropical plants, seemed, like their inhabitants, plunged in the voluptuous drowsiness of the siesta. The environs of the royal residence were equally solitary, equally peaceful.

—One of the Queen's sons, a swarthy colossus who advanced to meet us, clad in black, introduced us into a great drawing-room, the blinds of whose windows were lowered, where a dozen women were seated in motionless silence.

In the midst of this apartment two great gilded chairs were placed side by side.

Pomare, who occupied one, invited the admiral to take his seat in the other, while an interpreter exchanged official compliments between the old friends.

This woman, whose name had been linked with the

exotic dreams of my childhood, was clad in a robe of pink silk that fitted her body like a sheath, and appeared to me as an old copper-colored woman, with an imperious and harsh face. But even in the massive ugliness of her old age one could still distinguish traces of the charms which had rendered her both famous and fascinating in her youth, and of which the navigator of other years had brought us memories.

The women of her suite, viewed in this penumbra of a darkened room, and in the calm silence of the tropical day, had an undefinable charm. They were almost all beautiful with the beauty of Tahiti: black eyes heavy with languor and the amber tint of gypsies. Their unconfined tresses were adorned with wild flowers; and their robes of trailing gauze, loose at the waist, fell about them in long floating folds. . . .

It was one tropical midday, silent and burning, when I saw my little sweetheart Rarahu for the first time in my life. The young Tahitian girls, accustomed to bathe in the brook of Fataoua, overcome with heat and sleep, were lying upon the grass of its banks, their feet dipping in the clear, cool water. The shadow of the thick verdure fell upon us, vertically and without motion; great butterflies of velvet black, marked with large scabby-colored spots, flew heavily around us or even perched upon us, as if their silky wings were too heavy to bear them away; the air was filled with enervating and unfamiliar odors; and I gently allowed myself to sink into this soft, sweet life, to abandon myself to the charms of Oceanica.

In the background of the picture, suddenly the

branches of the mimosas and guavas opened, a gentle sound of rustling leaves was heard, and two little girls appeared, examining the situation with the mien of mice coming out of their holes.

They were crowned with garlands of leaves, which protected their pretty heads against the heat of the sun; their loins were tightly girt with *parcos** with broad yellow stripes on a blue ground; their tawny torsos were slenderly graceful and naked; their hair long, black and loosely flowing. There were no Europeans, no strangers nothing disquieting in sight. So the two little ones lay down under the cascade, which began to sport noisily around them. The prettiest was Rarahu; the other Tiahoui was her friend and confidante.

* * * * *

—"Loti", said Queen Pomare, addressing me a month later, in her deep hoarse voice—

"Loti, why do you not marry little Rarahu of the Apire district?—I assure you it would be the best thing to do, and would give you more friends in the country."

It was under the royal verandah that this question was put to me. I was lying at full length on a mat, holding in my hand five cards my friend Teria had just dealt out to me;—before me lay at full length my fantastic partner the Queen, who was passionately fond of *ecarte*: She was clad in a dressing-gown of yellow with great black flowers on it, and smoked a long cigarette of

* *parcos*—a national dress of Tahiti. Many girls clothe themselves only from the waist down with these graceful garments, usually of bright colors. — (Trans.)

pandanus, made of a single leaf rolled upon itself. Two attendant girls, wearing wreaths of jasmine flowers in their hair, marked our points, shuffled our cards, and aided us with their advice, while leaning in kindly curiosity over our shoulders.

Without the rain was falling,—one of those torrential rains, tepid and perfumed, which in that country accompany the storms of summer;—the great cocoa-palms bent under the rainfall, the strong veins of their leaves streamed with water. The heaped up clouds formed together with the gray of the mountains a sombre and heavy background in the scene, and towering far above the fantastic picture was visible the black horn of the peak of Fataoua. Emanations of the storm haunted and filled the air, and strangely troubled the senses and the imagination.

*—"Marry the little Rarahu of the Apire district!" The proposition taking me by surprise, gave me much food for reflection.

I need hardly say that the Queen, who was a very intelligent and sensible person, did not propose to me any such marriage as that which according to European laws fetters for life. She was full of indulgencies for the easy morals of her country, although she often strove to render them more correct and more conformable with Christian principles. It was, therefore, only a Tahitian marriage which was proposed to me. I could not find in my heart any serious objection to this desire of the Queen, and the little Rarahu of the Apire district was such a charming little creature!

* quotation is not closed in newspaper.

LEGEND OF THE MOONS

LEGEND OF THE MOONS

From "LE MARIAGE DE LOTI."

"The New Orleans Times-Democrat", February 12, 1882.

A LEGEND of Oceanica relates that there were once five moons in the sky, above the great ocean.* These moons had human features, much more distinctly marked than those of the present moon; and they cast evil spells upon the first men who inhabited Tahiti. Those who lifted their faces to look upon them were seized with strange madness. Then the great god Taaroa sought to conjure them. They moved and quivered in the sky;—they were heard to chant magical songs in immensity, with mighty and terrible far-off voices;—they chanted magical chants as they moved away from the earth. But they commenced at last to tremble under the power of Taaroa;—dizziness seized upon them, and they fell with a sound of thunder upon the ocean, which opened, boiling, to receive them.

These five fallen moons formed the islands of Bora-Bora, Emeo, Huahine, Raiatea and Toubouai-Manou.

* * * * *

Nocturnal baths are in high favor in Tahiti; joyous bevvies of young girls go to the woods by moonlight to plunge into the deliciously cool water of the natural basins of the springs. Then it is that the single word "Toupapahou" dropped by some one among the crowd

* A strange tradition, not wholly perhaps without foundation.—Trans.

of bathers, puts them all to wild flight. "Toupapahou" is the name of those tatooed phantoms which are the terror of all Polynesians,—a strange word, in itself terrifying and untranslatable.

* * * * *

Rarahu knew nothing at all of the god Taaroa. . . . Queen Pomare alone, through respect for the traditions of her country, had learned the names of these divinities of old, and preserved in her memory the strange traditions of ancient times.

But all those fantastic words of the Polynesian tongue which had impressed me,—all those words of vague and mystical signification, which have no equivalents in the language of Europe,—these were all familiar to Rarahu, who employed them or explained them to me with a rare and singular poetry.

. . . . "If thou couldst oftener remain at Apire by night," she said,—*"thou wouldst learn from me much more quickly a host of words which those girls who live at Papeete do not know. When we shall have been afraid together in the night, then I shall be able to teach thee regarding the Toupapahous some very frightful things which thou art ignorant of."*

And indeed there are in the Maori language many words and images which only become intelligible after a long time,—when one has lived with the aborigines by night in the woods, listening to the sighing of the wind and the sobbing of the sea,—with ears eager to catch all the mysterious sounds of nature.

* * * * *

Mata reva was the name Rarahu had given me. "Mata," in its proper signification, means eye; for the Maoris designate people according to the characteristics of the eye, and the names they thus give are generally very appropriate and happy.

Rarahu refused to find in my eyes any resemblance to those of any animal; the more poetical appellation of "*Mata reva*" she selected herself, after long hesitation.

I consulted the rare dictionary of the brothers Picpus, —and found this:—

"REVA, —firmament, abyss, deep of deeps, mystery." . . .

. . . . Rarahu was examining with much attention and terror a skull which I held upon my knees.

We were both sitting upon the summit of a tumulus of coral, situated at the foot of a lofty forest of ironwood. It was evening in the remote district of Papenoo;—the sun was plunging slowly into the great green Ocean, in the midst of the astounding silence of nature.

Rarahu, serious and meditative, had given herself up to one of those child-reveries of hers, the nature of which I was never able to comprehend but imperfectly. A moment she was all illuminated with golden light; and then, when the radiant sun had sunk into the abysses of the sea, her slender and graceful silhouette became sharply relieved against the sunset sky.

Never before had Rarahu so closely examined the ghastly object I held upon my knees, which for her, as for all Polynesians, is an object of horrible fear.

It was evident that the sinister thing had evoked in her uncultured mind a host of new ideas,—beyond her power to express in any precise form. . . .

That skull must have been very ancient; it was almost fossilized, and of that reddish tint which the earth of that country lends to stones and bones. . . . Death has lost its horror when it goes back so far.

. . . . "*Riaria*" said Rarahu—"riaria!" a Tahitian word only very imperfectly translated by the word "frightful," because there it is used to designate that peculiarly sombre terror inspired by ghosts or the dead.

. . . . "What is there to frighten thee in this poor skull?" I asked of Rarahu.

Pointing with her finger to the toothless mouth, she replied:—

—"It is its laugh, Loti; its Toupapahou laugh."

* * * * *

A deep darkness filled the woods; and the sweet smell exhaled by the Tahitian plants. The soil was strewn with great dry palm-leaves, which crackled under our feet. Above was heard that noise peculiar to cocoa-palm groves;—the metallic sound of the long leaves rubbing together; behind the trees we seemed to hear the laughs of Toupapahous; and under our feet there was a disgusting and horrible creeping sound, caused by the flight of whole nations of blue crabs, hastening at our approach to hide themselves in their subterranean habitations.

* * * * *

—"When man is dead," said Rarahu, "and buried

beneath the earth, what power can make him rise again?"

—"Yet," I replied, seeking recourse to certain dark beliefs which she had never lost,—“nevertheless thou hadst fear of phantoms; thou knowest well, that at this very moment, near us, about us, among these trees there may be.” . . .

—"Ah! yes," she answered with a shudder, "after death perhaps there may be the Toupapahou; after death there is the phantom which still, for awhile at least, appears, and wanders a shadow through the woods;—but I think that the Toupapahou itself finally fades out also forever, when the form of the body has ceased to exist beneath the ground,—and that is the end of all."

Never shall I forget that sweet, clear child-voice, uttering in its strange and softly beautiful tongue, such weirdly dismal things.

* * * * *

[Her last letter, addressed to the midshipman Loti, on board of H. M. S. "Reindeer."]

E tau here iti e!

E tau tiare noanoa no te ahiahi e!

e mea roa te mawiwi no tau mafatu

no te mea e aita hio au ia oe. . . .

E tau fetia taiao e!

te oto tia nei ra tau mata no te mea e aita hoi

oe amuri noa tu! . . .

Ia ora na oe i te Atua mau

Na to oe hoa iti,

RARAHU.

(TRANSLATION)

O my dear little friend!
 O my perfumed flower of evening!
 Great is the pain in my heart
 At not being able to see thee any more.
 O my star of the morning!
 My eyes melt away in tears
 When I think thou wilt never return to me.
 I salute thee in the name of the true God, in the
 Christian faith.
 Thy little friend, RARAHU.

* * * * *

Natuaea—"a confused vision of the night."

Far off there, below, on the other side of the world, the lofty height of Bora-Bora erected its weird silhouette against the gray and crepuscular sky of dreams. . . .

. . . . Thither I came, borne by a black ship, which glided without noise over an inert sea,—a ship urged by no wind, yet moving rapidly. Very near, very, very near the land, under high black masses which seemed like great trees, the vessel touched the coral beach, and stopped in its course. It was night, and I sat there motionless, waiting for day,—my eyes fixed upon the land, with a nameless and indefinable horror,

At last the sun arose, a huge sun, so pale, so pale, that it seemed like a sign in the sky announcing to men the consummation of Time—a sinister meteor-precursor of the final chaos,—a vast dead sun. . . .

Bora-Bora became illuminated with wan gleams;

then I beheld human forms sitting down as though waiting for me, and I descended to the beach. . . .

Among the trunks of the cocoa-palms,—under their lofty and solemn and gray colonnades,—there were women sitting upon the ground, veiling their faces with their hands as though watching over the dead: they seemed to have been crouching there from time immemorial, . . . their long hair almost wholly veiled them; they were motionless; their eyes were closed, but even through their transparent eyelids I could perceive their pupils fixed upon me. . . .

And in the midst of them a human form was lying, all rigid and white, upon a bed of pandanus. . . .

I drew near that slumbering phantom,—I bent me over that dead face. . . . Rarahu began to laugh. . . .

And at that phantom-laugh, it seemed to me that the sun went out, and I found myself in darkness again.

Then a great and terrible wind passed through the atmosphere, and I, confusedly noted ghastly things: . . . the tall cocoa-palms writhing under the might of the spectral winds,—and tatooed ghosts squatting in their shadows,—and the Maori cemeteries of that far-off land red-dened with ancient bones,—and the strange sounds of sea and coral reef,—and the blue crabs that love corpses creeping and swarming in the darkness,—and Rarahu lying at full length among them, her child body enveloped in her long black hair,—Rarahu with empty eyes, laughing with the eternal laugh, the fixed, the frozen laugh of the Toupapahous. . . .

. . . . "*O my dear little friend! O my perfumed*

flower of evening! great is the pain in my heart at not being able to see thee again! O my star of the morning, mine eyes melt in tears when I think thou wilt never come back to me.

"I salute thee in the name of the true God, in the Christian faith.

"Thy little friend,

"RARAHU."

SAINT LOUIS, CAPITAL OF SENEGAL

SAINT LOUIS, CAPITAL OF SENEGAL

From "LE ROMAN D'UN SPAHL"

"The New Orleans Democrat", October 30, 1881.

DESCENDING the African coast, after the southern extremity of Morocco has been passed, for many nights and days an interminable extent of desolate land is always visible from the shore. This is the Sahara, that vast waterless sea, which the Moors call "Bleudel-Atcuch," the Land of Thirst.

These desert shores are five hundred leagues in length, offering not even one solitary point for a passing vessel to reckon from, not even a plant, not a vestige of life.

The vast solitudes file by with dismal monotony, moving dunes, indefinite horizons; and the intensity of the heat augments day by day.

And then at last appears above the sands an ancient white city, with a few scattered yellow palm-trees; this is Saint Louis of the Senegal, the capital of Senegambia.

A church; a mosque; a tower; houses built in the moresque style. All this seems to doze under the burning sun, like those Portuguese cities which once flourished on the Congo coast—Saint Paul and Saint Philip of Benguela.

As the vessel approaches the shore one is astounded on perceiving that the city is not built on the beach, that it has no port, that it has no communication with the outer world; the coast, very low and forming a straight line, is inhospitable as that of the Sahara; and an eternal

line of breakers prevents the mooring of vessels near the land.

Then one also observes what he could not perceive from the open sea,—vast human ant-hills upon the shore, thousands upon thousands of thatched cabins,—Liliputian huts with pointed roof, where a strange negro population swarms. These are two great Yolof cities—Guet-n'dar and N'dartoute, which separate Saint Louis from the sea.

If the vessel casts anchor before this coast, one will soon see long canoes with prows formed like fishes' jaws, and shaped like sharks, manned by black men who row standing upright. These canoe-men are tall sinewy types of the black Hercules—admirably built and splendidly muscled, but having the faces of gorillas. In passing the breakers their canoe has upset at least ten times. But with the characteristic perseverance of negroes and the agility and strength of clowns, ten times they have righted their canoe and recommenced their passage; sweat and sea-water streams over their bodies as over a surface of varnished ebony.

Nevertheless they get to the ship at last, and smile with an air of triumph, displaying their magnificent rows of white teeth. Their entire costume consists of an amulet and a necklace of glass beads; their cargo of a leaden box carefully closed:—this is the letter-box.

In that box are the orders of the government officials to the vessel that has arrived; and to that box are also consigned all letters addressed to the colony.

When one is in a hurry, he may fearlessly confide himself to the hands of these men, who will certainly fish

him out of the water as often as he falls into it, and will finally land him on the strand with the greatest care.

But it will be more agreeable for him to continue on his way to the south, as far as the mouth of the Senegal river, when great flat-boats will come to take him up the river quietly to Saint Louis.

This isolation from the sea is a source of great stagnation and sorrow for the country. Saint Louis cannot serve as a stopping place for packets or the merchant vessels on their way to the other hemisphere. No one ever goes there except when obliged to; and once there, no one gets away again. One feels a prisoner there, and not only a prisoner, but absolutely separated from all the rest of the world.

AN AFRICAN TORNADO

AN AFRICAN TORNADO

From "LE ROMAN D'UN SPAHL"

"The New Orleans Times-Democrat", December 11, 1851.

. . . . OH the first tornado! . . . In a motionless leaden sky a sort of dark dome, a strange "celestial sign" begins to rise from the horizon.

It rises and rises and rises,—assuming extraordinary, unheard-of, terrific shapes. At first one would take it to be eruption of some gigantic volcano, the explosion of a whole world! Vast arches form in the sky and rise higher and higher, and become superimposed with startling sharpness of contour, in opaque heavy masses;—it looks as though enormous vaults of stone were about to crumble down upon the face of the earth;—and then all this becomes illuminated weirdly from below, with metallic gleams,—wan, greenish, or copper-colored,—and rises, and rises still.

The artists who have painted the Deluge, the Day of the Last Judgment, the cataclysms of the primitive world, never imagined sights so fantastic, skies so terrible.

And still there is not a breath of air, not one trembling movement in all that weary nature.

* * * * *

Then all of a sudden comes a frightful gust; the trees, the plants, the birds, lie down as if prostrated by the blows of a prodigious whip; the terrified vultures are swept hither and thither; the storm overthrows everything

in its path. The tornado is unchained, everything shudders and shakes; nature writhes under the frightful power of the meteoric force that passes by.

For about twenty minutes all the cataracts of heaven are let loose upon the earth; a diluvian rain refreshes the thirsty soil of Africa; the fury of the wind strews the earth with leaves, branches and debris.

* * * * *

And then everything calms down. It is all over. The last gusts chase away the last of the copper-tinted clouds, sweep off the last fragments of ruins left by the cataclysm;—the meteor is past—the sky becomes once more spotlessly pure, motionless and blue.

THE GRIOTS

THE GRIOTS

From "LE ROMAN D'UN SPAHI."

"The New Orleans Democrat", November 20, 1881.

IN the Soudan, the art of music is confined to a certain class or caste of men called Griots, with whom the profession of wandering musicians and composers of heroic songs is hereditary.

The Griots have the duty of beating the tam-tam for the bamboulas, and of chanting on holidays the praises of personages of high rank.

When a chief desires to hear his own glories exalted, he sends for his griots, who sit down before him upon the sand, and extemporize in his honor, a long series of official couplets, accompanying their shrill voices with the sounds of a very primitive little guitar, the cords of which are stretched over serpents' skin.

The griots are the laziest and most philosophical people in the whole world;—they lead a wandering life and never trouble themselves about the morrow. They go from village to village, either alone, or in the train of some great war-chief,—receiving alms here and there, but everywhere treated like pariahs, as the gypsies are in Europe;—sometimes overwhelmed with riches and honors;—excluded from participation in all religious ceremonies during their life, and after their death from all rites of burial and places of sepulture.

They sing melancholy ballads with vague and mysterious words;—heroic songs resembling melopeia in their

monotony, warrior-marches in their scanned and nervous rhythm;—dancing-airs replete with frenzy;—love-songs which are transports of amorous fury, which seems the howling of wild beasts in delirium. But in all this black music the melody is more or less the same;—as among all very primitive races, it is composed of brief sad phrases—a sort of gamuts more or less diversified, which begin from the highest notes possible to the human voice, and rapidly descend to the deepest bass, and then prolong themselves into lamentations.

The negresses sing a great deal while they work, or during that listless half-doze which is their siesta. In that great noonday calm, more enfeebling by far than in our southern country districts in France, this song of the Nubian women has a peculiar charm, mingled as it is with the eternal chirruping of the grasshoppers. But it would be impossible to transport it elsewhere, out of its exotic frame of sun and sand: heard in any other part of the world, the song is no longer the same.

The more the melody seems to be primitive, impossible to catch by reason of its monotony,—the more the rhythm is difficult and complicated. Those long nuptial processions one meets at night, slowly moving over the moonlit sands, sing under the leadership of a griot, general choruses of a very strange movement, the accompaniment to which is a persistent counter-time, and which seems to bristle purposely with rhythmic difficulties and fantasticalities.

One very simple instrument, only used by the women, plays an important part in this chorus music; it is simply

a long gourd open at one end, to be struck by hand, sometimes over the opening, sometimes at the side, and which thus renders two different sounds—one deep and hollow, the other sharp and dry. Nothing more in the shape of tone can be extracted from it; and nevertheless the result obtained is something astonishing. It is difficult to describe in words the sinister and almost diabolical effect of this distant sound of negro voices half drowned by hundreds of such instruments.

The perpetual counter time preserved throughout the accompaniment, and the totally unexpected syncopes perfectly comprehended and observed by all the performers simultaneously, are the most characteristic peculiarities of this musical art—inferior, perhaps, to our own, but most assuredly very different from it—which our European organizations do not enable us to comprehend thoroughly, which our ears but vaguely understand.

A SENEGAL LANDSCAPE

A SENEGAL LANDSCAPE

FROM "LE ROMAN D'UN SPANIL"

"*The New Orleans Democrat*", October 30, 1881.

. . . . THERE was never any coolness nor any comfort at Gadianguay, nor even any cool nights like the winter nights in Senegal.

From the earliest hour of dawn, under all that luxuriant mass of splendid foliage, the same heavy and deadly temperature always prevailed; from the earliest morning before the rising of the sun, whether in the forests peopled by noisy monkeys, green parrots, and rare humming-birds, or in the pathways full of shadow, winding through tall grass and undergrowth where serpents glide,—always, always, at all hours and in all places, the same furnace heat, humid, overwhelming, venomous! The hot heaviness of the equatorial atmosphere forever hanging under the foliage of the great trees, and fever everywhere in the air, everywhere!

It was full noon; they were in a Mandingo pirogue, protected by an awning kept continually moist.

They glided close by the thick verdure of the banks; they passed under the branches and hanging roots of the trees, trying to profit even by the dangerous and hot shade flung down upon the water by the monstrous vegetation.

That water seemed stagnant and motionless; it was heavy as oil; and thin fever-vapors hovered above its smooth surface.

The sun was in the zenith; his rays descended perpendicularly from a sky of violaceous gray,—a gray as of tin all tarnished miasmatic emanations of the marshes.

The heat was something so terrible that the black rowers were obliged to rest, despite their resolution. The lukewarm water could not appease their thirst; they were worn out, and seemed as though melting in sweat.

And then, when they stopped, the pirogue, gently carried along by an almost imperceptible current, drifted away. The Spahi could then study that extraordinary world closely, that world existing beneath the mangrove trees which people all the great swamps of equatorial Africa.

Deep in the shadows, amid the obscure confusion of the great roots, that world slumbered.

There, at the distance of only two paces from the boat, which glided by slowly and so noiselessly—that even the birds were not awakened—lay, close enough to be touched, great glaucous crocodiles, stretched out softly in the slime, yawning with gaping, vicious jaws, and wrinkles about their mouths as of an idiotic smile; there, also were slender white herons, which slept rolled up like a ball of snow upon one of their long legs, and even perched on the very backs of the weary crocodiles so as not to soil their plumage; there, also, were kingfishers, with plumages of all greens and all blues, taking their siesta on branches level with the water, together with many lazy lizards; — there were huge and astounding butterflies, hatched under furnace temperature, perched everywhere, opening and closing themselves slowly like

fans—looking like withered leaves when closed, but resplendent as mystic jewel-boxes when opened, sparkling with nacreous blues and gleams of metallic color.

Above all there were mangrove roots, roots and roots, hanging everywhere like bunches of filaments; they were of all lengths and of all thicknesses; they intertwined and hung down everywhere; one might have taken them for thousand of nerves, of elephant-trunks, of long grey arms seeking to enter everywhere and twine themselves about all things. Enormous extents of territory were covered and veiled with these enlacements of roots. And swarming over all the slime, over the roots, over the backs of the crocodiles, were hosts of great gray crabs, perpetually moving their single ivory-white claws, as if seeking in a dream to seize imaginable prey. And the somnambulistic movement of all those innumerable crabs under the thick vegetation, was the only perceptible living movement in all that slumbering creation.

THE MARKET OF GUET-N'DAR,
SENEGAL

THE MARKET OF GUET-N'DAR, SENEGAL

From "LE ROMAN D'UN SPAIN."

"*The New Orleans Democrat*", November 20, 1881

. . . . AT Guet-n'dar, on the sand, great noise, a confusion of all types, a babel of all the tongues of the Soudan.—There the great market is perpetually open, full of people from all countries—a place where everything is sold, precious things and things absurd,—useful products and outlandish products,—things almost impossible to believe,—gold and butter,—meat and unguents,—sheep and manuscripts, slaves and gruel,—amulets and vegetables.

On one side, shutting in the picture, is an arm of the river, with Saint Louis beyond; its straight lines and Babylonian terraces; its bluish whiteness of whitewashing, sprinkled with the red of brickwork, and here and there the yellow plume of a palm-tree mounting into the blue sky.

On the other side, Guet-n'dar, the negro ant-hill, with its thousands of pointed roofs.

Near by, caravans halting, camels lying down in the sand, Moors unpacking their bales of arachis, their fetish-bags, or ornamental leather.

Market-men and market-women crouching in the sand, laughing or disputing; jostling or being jostled and trod upon—they and their wares together—by the crowds of purchasers.

—"Hou! dienday m'pat!" . . . (the female vendors

of sour milk, held in bags of goat-skin sewn together, with the hair inside.)

—"Hou! dienday nabam!" . . . (female vendors of butter of the Peuhle race,—with high three-horned chignons, ornamented with brass tinsel,—fishing with both hands for their merchandise in hairy sacks of skin;—then rolling it with their fingers into dirty little balls worth a sou a piece, and then wiping their paws on their hair.)

—"Hou! dienday Kheul! . . . dienday Khorom-palay!" . . . (the women who deal in simples, in packages of bewitched herbs, in lizards' tails, and roots of magical properties.)

—"Hou! dienday tchiakhkha! . . . dienday djiarab!" . . . (crouching women selling beads of gold and beads of jade, pearls of amber and hair bands of silver;—all arranged upon pieces of sordid rags laid upon the ground, —and trampled upon by customers.)

—"Hou! dienday guertay! . . . dienday khankel! . . . dienday yap-mor! . . . (the women dealers in pistachios,—in live ducks,—in crazy comestibles,—in sundried meats,—in sugared pies eaten by flies.)

Female dealers in salt fish, dealers in pipes, dealers in everything;—dealers in old jewelry, in old pagnes—old raiment all filthy and full of vermin and smelling of corpses;—in Sulam butter to grease woolly hair with;—in old woolly queues, cut or torn from the heads of dead negresses, and all plaited and gummed, and ready to be used again.

Dealers in grigris, in amulets, in charms, in old guns,

in gazelle droppings, in old kerans annotated by the most pious marabouts of the desert;—in musk, in flater, in old poniards with silver handles, in old iron knives which have already disemboweled more than one human being;—in tam-tams, in giraffe horns and in old guitars.

* * * * *

And camel dung everywhere, and dirt and wrecks of all sorts and heaps of filth unspeakable. And over it all a burning sun shining vertically down, that African sun which seems to be nearer to the earth there than in any other part of the world, and which bakes like the heat of a brazier too close to one.

And always, always the desert for horizon—the infinite platitude of the desert.

THE SPAHI'S DEATH

THE SPAHI'S DEATH

From "LE ROMAN D'UN SPAHI."

"*The New Orleans Democrat*", November 6, 1881.

. . . . In order to get to the French tents he had to pass through the camp of the Bambara allies. The night was transparent and luminous, with sounds of insects buzzing everywhere; one felt that there were thousands and thousands of them; crickets and grasshoppers, under every blade of grass, in all the little holes in the sand; sometimes this universal buzz swelled in volume, it became strident, deafening,—as though all the surface of the country were covered with an infinite number of tiny bells and rattles,—and, then again, the sound would die down, as though all the crickets had been given some secret order to sing lower;—then all would fade away into silence.

Jean proceeded dreamfully upon his way;—he was very dreamy, that evening. . . . And thus dreaming as he wandered on without looking before him, he suddenly found himself absorbed into a great round dance which whirled in cadence all around him. (The round dance is the favorite dance of the Bambaras.)

They were all very tall men these dancers, wearing long white robes, and high turbans also white, with two black horns.

And in the transparent night almost without noise the circle turned and turned—slowly but lightly as a circle of dancing spirits;—with faint rustlings of floating dra-

peries like the rustlings of the wings of great birds. . . . And the dancers all assumed divers poses together: now on the tip of one foot, leaning backward or forward, simultaneously stretching their linked hands backward or forward, and extending like vast transparent wings, the thousand fluttering folds of their muslin robes.

The tam tam beat softly, as if on the sly; the melancholy flutes and ivory trumpets had muffled and as it were distant tones. A monotonous music, as of a magical incantation, led the round dance of the Bambaras.

And passing before the Spahi, all bowed their heads in token of recognition; with smiles, they murmured to him:

—"Tjean,* come join the circle!

Jean recognized nearly all of them in their festival robes: black Spahis or *tirailleurs*, who had temporarily resumed the long white *bonbon* and covered their heads with the *tembasembe* of holiday-wear.

Smiling, he saluted them as they whirled by him. "Good-evening, Niodagal! Good-evening, Iombe-Fafandon! Good-evening, Demba-Taco and Samba-Fal! Good-evening, tall Nyaor!" For Nyaor was also there, taller and handsomer than all the rest.

But Jean hurried on his way all the same, in order to escape from these long chains of white dancers, which opened and closed again, unwound and rewound themselves about him. For the scene made a strange impression upon him—the luminous African night, the ghostly

* Tjean, negro pronunciation of Jean. Many of the finest French troops are Mahometan negroes—of a comparatively superior race.

dance, and that music which did not seem to be music of this world. . . . And still murmuring,—“Tjean, come join the circle!” they continued to whirl about him like dreams, amusing themselves by surrounding the Spahi, by lengthening their long chain in order to prevent him from escaping.

* * *

When the Spahi regained his tent and lay down to rest, a host of plans and fancies passed through his mind. . . . Without, in the Bambara camp at regular intervals, he heard the voices of the Griots chanting the holy cry of war in three melancholy notes; they intoned this weird owl-cry over the sleeping tents, singing the black warriors to sleep. . . . The day of combat was at hand; and the negro king, Boubakar-Segou, was not far off.

* * * * *

At last all the voices of life were hushed in the village of Dialdé; and the camp also became silent. Afar off was heard the voice of the lion, and at intervals that most dismal of all cries in the world, the howling of the jackal! It seemed a funeral accompaniment to the dreams of the poor Spahi.

* * * * *

—“Jean!—come join the circle!”

Jean dozed, wearied by the long ride of the day,—and ever, while he dreamed of the future, in his dream he beheld whirling slowly around him the circle of the Bambara dancers. They passed and repassed with soft

gestures, dying attitudes,—always to the sound of a vague music not of this world.

—“Tjean!—come join the circle!”

Their heads bowing down to salute Jean seemed to bend under the weight of their lofty festival head-dresses. . . . Then, all changed. There were only grimacing faces, dead faces, skull faces which bowed to him with airs of recognition, low whispering with ghastly smiles:—

—“Tjean!—come join the circle!”

* * *

It is the day of battle.

Seven o'clock in the morning.—An unfamiliar spot in the land of Diambour. A marsh full of water-plants, veiling a shallow stretch of water. A low hill, bounding the horizon to the north;—on the opposite side, plains rolling away out of sight—the vast fields of Dialakar.

All is silent and desolate;—the sun slowly mounts into the pure sky.

Suddenly horsemen appear in this African landscape,—a landscape which would have seemed quite as natural in some solitary part of ancient Gaul. Proudly erect upon their horses, they are all handsome to look upon,—with their red jackets, blue trousers, and broad white hats pulled down upon their bronzed faces.

They are twelve—twelve Spahis sent out as scouts under the command of an adjutant,—and Jean is among them.

There is no presage of death, nothing funereal in the air,—nothing but the calm and purity of the sky. In the

marsh, the high plants, still humid with the dews of the night, glitter under the sky;—the dragon flies dart about on their great transparent wings spotted with black;—the water lilies open their huge white flowers upon the water.

The heat is already intense and heavy; the horses stretch their heads out toward the water, opening their nostrils, scenting the coolness of the slumbering marsh. The Spahis pause a moment to hold council; they dismount to moisten their hats and bathe their feverish foreheads.

* * * * *

Suddenly in the distance asound is heard as of mighty blows—as of enormous bass drums, all being beaten simultaneously.

—“*The great tamtams!*” shouts the Sergeant Muller, who had seen many wars in the negro country.

And instinctively all those who had dismounted rushed to their horses.

But a black head suddenly rose near them through the grass;—an aged marabout had made, with his withered hand, a fantastic sign, like a magic command addressed to the reeds of the marsh; and a hail of lead fell upon the Spahis.

* * * * *

The aim, slowly surely, patiently taken in security was unerring. Five or six horses were stricken down; the rest, terrified and maddened, reared and threw their wounded riders,—and Jean, also, was laid prostrate with a rifle-ball in his loins.

At the same moment thirty sinister heads emerged from the tall herbage, thirty black demons, covered with mud, bounded forward, gnashing their white teeth like infuriated apes.

O, heroic combat! worthy to have been sung by Homer; but which will remain forever unknown and obscure, like so many other combats fought in far-distant Africa!

They performed prodigies of strength and courage, the poor Spahis, in their desperate defense. They sold their lives dearly indeed, these men, all young, strong and hardened in war. And in a few years more, even in St. Louis, they will be forgotten! Who shall tell the names of those who fell in the country of Diambour, upon the fields of Dialakar?

* * * * *

And all the while the thunder of the great tamtams came nearer and nearer.

And suddenly, during the melee, the Spahis beheld as in a dream, a mighty black army passing over the hills;—half-naked warriors, covered with gri-gris, rushing in the direction of Dialde, in broken masses;—enormous war tamtams which four strong men could hardly drag along in the wild race;—thin desert-horses, which seemed full of fire and fury, harnessed with singular tinsel trappings, covered with thin plates of brass,—with long tails and long manes dyed blood-red;—a fantastic host, a demoniac procession;—an African nightmare sweeping by more rapidly than the wind.

Boubakar-Segou was passing by.

He was rushing upon the French Column further off; passing without even noticing the Spahis, leaving them to be exterminated by the men he had sent on to lie in ambush.

* * * * *

There was no time to reload; they fought with knives, sabres, fists and teeth;—everywhere wounds were yawning, entrails bleeding.

Two black men attacked Jean with frenzy; he was stronger than they; he rolled them upon the ground, and trampled madly upon them—but they always came at him again.

At last his fingers could no longer obtain a hold upon the oily blackness of their naked skin; his hands slipped in blood;—and the drain of his wounds enfeebled him.

His eyes confusedly perceived these last images;—his dead comrades all lying at his feet;—and the vast mass of the negro army still running to battle, and now almost out of sight,—and handsome Muller near by, with the death-rattle in his throat, and vomiting blood;—and far off, very far off, tall Nyaor hewing himself a bloody way to safety in the direction of Salde, reaping a path through a mass of black men with mighty sabre-strokes.

* * * * *

And then, three together threw Jean down upon his side;—two held his arms;—the third pressed a great iron knife against his chest.

There was one frightful moment of anguish while Jean felt the pressure of that knife against his body. And no human succor for him,—none!—all dead—nobody!

The red cloth of his jacket, the coarse material of his soldier's shirt, and his flesh formed a sort of mattress-surface and resisted:—the knife was badly sharpened.

The negro pushed with all his might: Jean uttered a great hoarse cry, and his chest was forced in.

The blade, with a horrible little crackling sound plunged deep into his breast;—they turned it in the wound, pulled it out with both hands, and pushed away the body with kicks.

* * *

Jean, dragging himself under the thin shadow of the tamarindo, tried to find a spot where his head could be in the shade, and lie down there to die.

He had a great thirst, a burning thirst; and he commenced to feel little convulsive movements in his throat.

He had often seen his African comrades die; and he recognized that ghastly sign of the End, which people call the hiccough of death.

The blood poured from his side; and the arid sand drank up that blood like dew.

Nevertheless, he did not now suffer so much. But for that thirst which was burning him up, he had almost ceased to suffer.

Strange visions came to the poor Spahi;—the mountain-chain of the Cevennes, the familiar spots of other days, his mountain cottage.

Above all he saw vast stretches of fresh landscape—shadows and mosses, coolness and mountain—springs—and his dear old mother, coming to lead him gently by the hand, as in the days of his youth.

O for a kiss from his mother,—his mother caressing his forehead with her poor old trembling hands, and cooling his burning head with fresh water.

What!—would his mother never, never kiss him again?—would he never again hear the sound of her voice? Never! Never! This was the end of all! To die alone in the sun!—in the desert! And he half rose up in his desperate desire not to die.

* * * * *

—“Tjean! come join the circle!”

Before him like a whirling gust—like a furious storm-wind, a circle of dancing phantoms passed.

Where the whirlwind touched the burning gravel, sparks gushed up.

And the diaphonous dancers, mounting in rapid spirals, like smoke swept by a wind, were lost on high, in the flaming blue of the ether.

And Jean felt as if he were following them—he had a sensation as of being lifted by terrible wings; and he thought it was the supreme moment of death.

But it was only a cramping of all his muscles—a great and horrible spasm of pain.

A jet of pink blood gushed from his mouth;—a voice hissing at his very temple said once more:—

—“Tjean, come join the circle!”

And calmer, and suffering less he sank back upon his bed of sand.

* * * *

It was almost midday. Jean suffered less and less; the desert, under the intense tropical light, seemed to him like a great brasier of white fire, whereof the heat no longer burned him. Nevertheless his chest dilated as if to breathe more air; his mouth opened as if to ask for water.

And then his lower jaw fell altogether; his mouth opened widely for the last time; and Jean died, gently enough, in a blinding blaze of sunlight.

* * *

When Fatou-gaye came back, the women of the allied tribe informed her that the battle was already over.

She came to the camp, anxious, panting, worn-out, always carrying her little sleeping child upon her back, wrapped up in a piece of blue stuff.

The first she saw was the Mussulman, Nyaor-Fall, the black Spahi, who was telling the beads of his long Maghreb rosary, and watched her coming with a grave face.

In the language of the country, she faltered out three broken words:

—"Where—is—he?"

And Nyaor, with a stern gesture, extended his arm toward the southern part of the country of Diambour,—toward the fields of Dialakar.

—"He is there!" he answered,— "he has gone to Paradise."

IN ALGERIA

IN ALGERIA

From "FLEURS D'ENNUI."

"*The New Orleans Times-Democrat*", April 1, 1883.

[Readers of THE TIMES-DEMOCRAT will probably remember our translations from "*Le Roman d'un Spahi*" and "*Le Mariage de Loti*." The author of those works is the most impressive French writer living. He is a French naval officer; but his real name has not yet been made public. He combines the rich strength of Gautier with the tropical fantasticality of Baudelaire, and something more—a profound pantheistic philosophy which tints every page of his work. His new volume, *Fleurs d'Ennui*, from which we make the following selections, is a collection of tales descriptive of life and love and adventure in Montenegro, Africa, China, and elsewhere. At a future day we will give some more and equally extraordinary extracts.—TRANS.]

. . . . AN attic with a mat, a white mattress, and an Arab blanket;—this is Suleima's room. She lights a little copper lamp placed upon the floor, and makes a sign of welcome.

And I, half-reclining upon this couch, contemplate Suleima, who stands before me, lighted from beneath by the flame of her lamp. She is slenderly elegant as a Greek figure in her long white garments; she has lifted her naked arms above her head; and her shadow which rises to the black ceiling, seems like the shadow of an amphora.

She gazes at me with a smile; and her smile is kind and sweet; there is no effrontery in her look. . . . With her preternaturally large eyes, and the exquisite regularity of her features, she looks this evening like some brown madonna. . . .

As she passes to and fro through the chamber, she

moves with that slight swaying of the hips which is the supreme grace of woman, and which, among us, high heels and narrow shoes have changed into another and artificial something. The women of antiquity must have walked with just such a swaying motion,—which is possible only with bare feet.

Her garments are impregnated with that pleasing odor which all the women of the Orient have—even the poorest. And it also seems to me that she smells of the desert; and her motions—the motions of a nervous girl, still slimly formed,—have at times the suppleness and elasticity of a grasshopper. . . .

We converse in a *sabir* partly Spanish; she has learned it from the young Jewesses of Algiers, and in speaking it, she continually and unreasonably uses the harsh aspirations of her own desert tongue.

. . . . Does she remember the lumps of sugar I gave her at the gate of the cafe Soubiran? . . . Yes; she almost believes that she can remember it. . . . But she was so little then! Now, she seats herself crosslegged, so as to search her memory more at ease—as though it were something very important. And at last, after long reflection, she says No;—I had only been telling her a story; it could not have been me:—the thing had happened too long ago, and I could not look so young. . . .

Moreover, since that time, she had made a long sojourn into the interior; her father had taken her with him far away into the Biskra country—her own country—and beyond, very far beyond, into the South. At first they walked a long, long way on foot; then they traveled

with a caravan;—she herself rode on a camel, with several Arab ladies. So they passed into that country where there is nothing but sands. . . .

Ah! yes; I too know that country where there is nothing but sands. I buried myself in it even deeper and further than ever did Suleima—by way of the black Soudan; and I suffered much there. I behold it all again as she speaks of it,—as she describes it to me with her childlike simplicity. And as mine eyes close, and the little lamp dies down, I see again plainly, very plainly, that long caravan passing by, under the heaven of eternal blue, over the rose-colored sands. . . .

* * *

THE SUN GOD

High above our heads, burning us even through the white tents, blazed that sun, radiant, eternal, which I have ever and everywhere seen smile with his eternal sphinx-smile, upon the vague regrets which endure not, just as upon the greatest heartrendings and mightiest despairs, which, alas! also pass away.

He has ever had for me an irresistible attraction, that sun; I have worshiped him during my whole life; I have sought him in all the lands of the earth. Even more than love, he changes the aspects of things; and when he appears, I forget all else for his sake. And, in certain countries of the Orient, in the vast and eternally azure heaven,—his presence, never softened, never veiled, fills me with melancholy unutterable, a melancholy more secret and more profound than the sadness of Northern mists. . . .

But it is in Africa, in the sands of the vast *Waterless Sea*, that I have felt myself most strangely close to his devouring personality.

He is my God. I personify and adore him in that of his forms which is the most ancient and consequently the most true—the most terrible, likewise, and most implacable: Baal! . . . And even to-day the Baal my fancy pictures is Baal-Zeboub,—the Mighty Putrifier.

I have seen those old temples of Southern America, where he was wont to be adored under a form less comprehensible to our Old-World minds;—I have also sought for him there, among the sanctuaries overthrown, between the walls covered with mysterious bas reliefs—the vestiges of an antiquity which is not ours, and which is no longer known. But no!—that was a strange and distant Baal; I could not comprehend him—that sun which hatched out the yellow-skinned and the red-skinned races of humanity, and all the nature of those too remote lands. And there, while seeking to embrace my God, I would lose myself,—I would feel myself swallowed up by a void and a terror that has no name.

It is only in our own old world, that I can feel and comprehend him a little—that Baal who creates and putrifies—when he rises in the ever deep and azure sky above the white and dead cities of Islam, or above the great ruins of that Orient which was the cradle of our race. Above all, when he passes over Moslem Africa, and over the infinity of the sands of the Sahara;—and, at some future day, when I shall feel coming upon me the chilliness of pallid age, it will be into that desert that I

shall go to bring my bones to him that he may bleach them white. . . .

What I have just said perhaps no one will comprehend. Even the friend who walks beside me, and who knows how to read my most secret thoughts, could no longer understand me. These thoughts are mysterious intuitions, come from I know not where, which sometimes escape me;—hardly do I dare to formulate them and give them written expression. . . .

* * *

TROPICAL LOVE

. . . . Neither can I feel love as those feel it who have remained simple-hearted. For me there is something mingled with it unutterably strange and mortal—an awful preoccupation of the *Beyond*,—an anguish, a fear of beholding everything come to an end. . . .

Oh! you can speak of the *Unknowable*. . . . But what, again, is that other mystery,—that omnipotent charm of beings who are beautiful? . . . Whence that wondrous charm of theirs? and of Whom are they the image? What is that something which may never be defined—beauty? What is it that radiates from all those marbles which have lived through the centuries and will remain eternally admirable—the Greek statues, the Aphrodites, the Phrynes, the torsos of antique women?

In this alone there is no illusion: in youth, in the visible and palpable beauty of terrestrial creatures. And I cling to this form of the *Unknowable*, the mightiest, the most manifest to human eyes;—and I adore it.

And this adoration is not wholly material; it is a supreme, sublime feeling which at moments seems to give me the true notion of the Infinite and of God. If the soul exist, it is in love that I have best comprehended its presence, that I have felt it most intimately amalgamated with my flesh. What is it that I have sought from all those whom I have loved, daughters of all lands of the earth . . . poor savage girls sometimes. . . . Think you it was only their admirable forms? Oh! no!—not merely that; for I have so loved them sometimes that I longed for power to give them a faith in divinity, and bear them with me into another life, eternally blended with me.

When I look back, and find them again in my memory,—those whom I have loved, it confounds me to know that I have ever forgotten them, and the adored expression of their eyes, and the charm of their country beloved because of them, and our dreams of faith, and our dreams of eternity;—it fills me with confusion and gives me the consciousness of human nothingness, and I understand how miserable a creature I am, impotent to find and to strain to my breast that *Something* which I long for,—powerless to bring myself nearer to the unknowable,—incapable of Eternity. . . .

Love! . . . It is all that remains to us when the rest has crumbled away. Love, without which there is nothing but darkness and death. Love, which has changed for me the aspects of all things, of all countries,—which has made my miseries delicious, and envenomed my prosperities. . . . Love, that has cast for me over certain countries

of the world that mysterious glamour which I have vainly exhausted myself in seeking to comprehend, to grasp, to translate into human words. . . . After all, I have never lived save by love;—in all life I can see nought but love.

And ere my youth pass from me, I wish that I may be buried in the same grave with her whom I now love, for fear lest otherwise that form of the *Unknowable* which I seek to embrace in her, may not flee away again, and I fall back into the void,—for fear lest I cease to love her,—for fear of the years which will come to wither us and annihilate us.

So weary am I of attempting all things,—so weary am I of opening my arms to embrace, that I would joyfully accept this death and this common burial, even while we are both still young. It would be the end of all; and I would love such an end.

Only first, I would want to have her moulded in marble, to show to the generations that will come after us how beautiful she was. . . . And upon that marble, which should be lightly amber-tinted, like alabaster under the sun, I would trace all about the eyes a deep black shade, to imitate the shadow of her eyelashes, deeper than the painted eyelashes of Arabian women;—that I might thus render the inexpressible something which lives in her look, and which I adore without being able to describe it,—that something which is delicious and rare,—above all when one gazes at it closely, very closely, close enough to touch. . . .

I would wish that in the grave she might be laid

upon me, so that the decomposition of her body might pass through my own. . . . But not in those cemeteries saturated with the dead—not in that soil where all human rubbish is left to rot pell mell! . . . No: somewhere in the vast woods, where we would be left all alone to crumble away together,—to melt together into earth,—to pass into the roots of trees, into the branches, into the mosses impending. . . .

* * *

A MYRTLE DREAM

. . . . A dream of the night. I was dead. I was in a cemetery, seated upon the stone of my own tomb, in the crepuscular light of a summer evening. There were circling flights of great moths in the air, and flies—and flowers everywhere among the tombs and the lofty grasses of the cemetery.

I knew the place; it was indeed the place where my grandparents slept their eternal sleep;—I felt again that peculiar horror which used to chill me when they led me to the graveyard of evenings to place wreaths upon the tombs;—a species of sadness, a species of horror that may not be expressed in human words. . . . There are impressions, sentiments—vague, indefinable—which are like the souvenirs or intuitions of extra-terrestrial things:—one feels them more sharply, one feels closer to the objects of such mysterious conceptions, in dreams than during wakefulness.

I was all alone in that cemetery, at twilight, seated upon my own tomb;—I had full consciousness of being only a vision, a thing impalpable, an appearance of being,

a phantom existing only by the force of my own will. I felt that I was soon to vanish altogether and forever,—to be extinguished in nothingness;—and I strove with all my might against the end;—I felt irreparable anguish for the loss of my body—my human body that had ceased to be, my flesh, the material of my life that had passed away from me. . . . And I dreamed of youth, and strength, and love, and of the bodies of young girls, and of the intoxication of the senses, and of the intoxication of life. . . . And I longed for all that was dead for me forever. Phantom that I was. . . . I felt myself soon about to disappear. . . .

There came along the alleys of the cemetery people I had known;—and I rose up; I approached them holding out my hand—in order to find out what I had become, in order to look as if I was alive, in order to see if they would be deceived. . . . They also advanced, and tried to touch me; they found nothingness only, and *passed through me!* . . . All of a sudden, they remembered that I was dead;—I saw a hideous fear in their eyes; and they rushed away from me.

Then I felt myself full of rage against the living; full of a phantom's desire to terrify—to do evil and to excite fear;—and I pursued after them; I ran after them over the tombs—making *Hoo! hoo!*—uttering hideous cries.

And when I had wearied of pursuing, I returned to sit down upon my tombstone to wait for others. I felt that I was *fading out*, in spite of the whole strain of my

will—that I was going, going, passing away,—that very soon I would cease even to be visible.

It was indeed a June evening;—there were perfumes of flowers in that cemetery—perfumes so sweet, so penetrating, that they made me drunk; there were garlands of roses everywhere on the tombs, and high-flowering plants, above which the moths and the flies still danced their airy round-dance. All these things intoxicated me with desire to live and love—dead though I was. . . .

Suddenly I saw Pasquala Ivanovitch passing along one of the alleys—with her flock of white goats. She, at least, Pasquala Ivanovitch, could not have heard that I was dead, because it had only just happened;—and I rose up, and went toward her, to see. . . . She gazed at me with a smile, and opened her arms to me; and I pressed her to my breast, and I found that I could still know all the intoxication of love. . . .

It was five o'clock in the evening. They came to awake me. I rose in haste and flung cold water upon my head, which ached terribly. . . . Myrtle and citron-flowers have perfumes which inspire strangely dismal dreams.

A BAT

Mandingo country there were long visible the remains of a fantastic palace he had had built for the purpose of giving extraordinary entertainments.

Having turned hermit in his old days, he had managed to obtain from the French government the command of the Ponga River. And he filled the duties of the position admirably, thanks to the alliances he had made in other years with the black chiefs;—he was just the man for that place.

One day news came that Father Barez was dead; and we hastened at once to the Ponga-river region, which had, immediately upon the old man's decease, become a prey to faction and anarchy.

When we arrived, the cabin of the old pirate, slumbering under the shadows of huge exotic trees, was bolted and barred—none had entered therein since the dead had been carried forth, and they were waiting for us to make the division of the property.

When the door was opened, there escaped from within a concentrated heat, an irrespirable air. Extraordinary objects were scattered all about in sinister confusion, and hanging to the wall was a great reddish-brown bat, sleeping with its head downward as it is the custom of bats to do. It woke up in terror on seeing the light, and extending its naked wings, flew here and there with all its might, knocking itself madly against every object in its way.

A terrified Breton sailor struck it down with a stick, saying:

"That is the old man's soul!"

And I forthwith shared the brave fellow's opinion;—it must indeed have been the old man's soul;—unable to rise toward the sky it had returned under a hideous shape to cling against the cabin-wall.

That great bat is still in my possession;—I keep it at home in a certain cabinet devoted to the preservation of all sorts of incredible things, and to the stuffed souvenirs of my travels through the world. It is preserved in a jar of sprits-of-wine, wherein it floats with head awry, and tongue protruding;—and inasmuch as it is not a nice thing to look at, I have partly concealed it behind a stuffed caiman. On the jar there is a label, somewhat faded and yellow by dint of long sea-voyaging; but thereon may still be read the words—“*Soul of Father Barez.*”

During his lifetime the old slaver had been wont to declare that the devil would inherit his soul. He was mistaken;—it was I who got it at last. . . .

* * *

A BRETON NIGHTMARE

. . . . I was on the very summit of the steeple of Creizker;—Yves was sitting near me, upon the head of a gargoyle of granite. The vague backgrounds of the Leon country undulated away far below our feet in that mysterious twilight which illuminates the visions of sleep.

It was winter; and all the Breton land was black. In the horizon appeared the foggy sea, and the Roscoff rocks towering up by tiers—as in those backgrounds painted by Da Vinci.

I said to Yves: “It seems to me that the Creizker tower is trembling.”

Yves answered:—"My dear brother, how could that be?" . . . And he looked down smilingly into the void.

I had vertigo, and I clung still more closely to the granite dentil which sustained us in air. All about us were marvelous open-work carvings in stone, and gargoyles with gnome-faces, to which yellow lichens—like those which gild all the old Breton church-towers—gave tufted-crests and goat-beards. And the base of the tower was lost in fading of colors, in confusion of lines, descending into the gloom of the ground.

Yves seemed to me bigger than usual,—his shoulders broader and even more athletic.

—"Yves," I said,—“I felt the Creizker tremble that time!”

. . . . And, in very truth, the old tower of Breton legend staggered upon its foundations; we felt it falling into the abyss;—the antique granite dentils began to dis-aggregate, to crumble away in air, and the ruins fell. Yet it was a slow, soft falling—like the falling of objects without weight,—and we fell ourselves, seeking to cling all the while to things which were falling with us.

. . . . Then we found ourselves wandering over the ground, in the midst of fallen rubbish which still continued to crumble. We had suffered nothing by the fall; but there was a strange pain in our hearts at the thought that the Creizker no longer existed.

We began to think—Yves and I—of the days when we used to sail upon that foggy sea. As we passed out into the open water, rocked and tossed by the huge western billows, drenched by mist and rain,—often in

those dim winter days, at the cold and weird coming of twilight, we used to see against the gray clouds afar off, the twin towers of the church of Saint-Pol, and near them upon the cliff, the Creizker, dominating them with its mighty granite stature. When the night promised to be wild, we loved to behold that ancient watcher of the sea, who appeared to keep ward over us from the height of the Breton cliffs. Now all was over;—we should never behold him more.

Yves especially could not be comforted for the destruction of his tower. I said to him,—“Never mind;—they will build it again;” but within myself I felt the irremediable character of that annihilation;—the tower was scattered over the soil in fragments as small as the pebbles of the beach. The marvelous work of dead centuries was destroyed, and it appeared to me a fatal omen that this should be so;—the ending of that giant among Breton steeples seemed to me the beginning of the end of all things;—and I resigned myself to that expected termination of all; I felt as one buried in meditation upon the final doom—pondering in apocalyptic expectation of chaos.

Then we saw that no trace of the ancient city of Saint-Pol, nor of the house in which Yves was born, could be seen about us. We were wandering along through the midst of a dark and desolate plain,—through furze-growths and briars; the earth had changed its face, assuming the physiognomy of the primitive epochs once more ere the moment of annihilation; and the Last Darkness was thickening around us.

Then Yves cried out to me with an intonation of childish fear,—“Brother! look at me well!—does it not seem to you that I have become much taller than I used to be?” And I replied “No”—just that he might not be frightened; but in truth I saw that he had become superhumanly tall, supernaturally large; and now he appeared clad like a Celt, with wolf-skins flung upon his shoulders. And all around us I beheld Larvæ-forms, moving in the still-deepening obscurity,—and I suddenly comprehended that we were both dead. . . .

* * *

WINTER STUDIES IN CHINA

. . . . Now we are in the open country, borne forward at the full speed of our little Mongol horse,—galloping, galloping. We are leaving behind us the long, straight line of the crenelated walls of Pe-King, and advancing into the midst of rice lands, whose innumerable narrow canals, frozen, gleam under the sun like steel needles flung upon the vast plain.

From time to time we perceive clumps of leafless trees surrounding ponderous white residences with curved roofs,—which are Chinese villas; or else mud-structures thatched with straw,—which are farm houses or peasants’ cabins.

These habitations seem like little islands lost in the vast flat sea of frost-hardened furrows, over which the red disk of the sun flings a tawny light.

From the very furthest verge of the horizon great clouds of ruddy dust arise and scurry over the naked ground;—sometimes these envelop us, and then we cannot see.

All the plain is gray;—it is an immense steppe, desolate and dismal.

If we forget for a moment in what country we are traveling, the least new details remind us of it;—a peasant clad in goat-skins throwing at us as he passes by that squinting and oblique glance,—shot upward toward the temples,—so characteristic of further Asia;—or dogs which have scented *the European* from afar, rushing toward us with furious mien.

Strange and inexplicable!—even the very animals in that country are aware of the profound differences of our race;—the buffaloes charge madly upon a white stranger; and the Mongol horses fight before allowing themselves to be mounted.

. . . . At last we come to a point where several roads intercross, all paved with slabs of white marble—remnants of the colossal splendors of that most ancient China, whereof the China of to-day is but a half-dead reflection. Here there rises into the cold and dusty air a high pole, from the summit of which hangs a basket containing a human head.

Above is a placard inscribed with Chinese characters:—“*Justice has punished crime. Tremble and obey!*”

We halt awhile to examine this face. It is well preserved by the frost, excepting that it has taken the brown tint of mummies;—the open eyes, upturned, show like two white slits rising toward the temples; the lips, edged with thin moustaches, leave two rows of sanguino-

lent teeth bare to the very ears;—the head seems to laugh and to cynically defy the inscription, which turns and twists in the wind above it, like a weather-cock, with dry sounds like a wooden rattle.

The long queue of the decapitated man hangs down from the basket, and swings in the wind with a pendulous motion, as if it were counting the eternities of chastisement which its owner's soul is condemned to suffer in the Buddhist hell.

But the *Ma-fou* (our driver), whose nature is not of a sensitive mold, jokingly sends the lash of his whip into the basket with a sharp crack; and the dead man's head, flung out like a stone from a sling, goes bounding along the pavement, to roll further on over the hardened clay.

* * * * *

Horsemen are going and coming, preceded by *Ma-fous* in livery, keeping their little horses at a full trot. These animals look at once droll and mischievous. Their riders sit gathered up in their long petticoats, as if squatting upon their lofty saddles, pushing their feet into the shortened stirrups up to their very heels. They wear garments of silk trimmed with precious furs, and boots of black velvet with pointed toes curving up *a la poulaine* upon thick soles of immaculate whiteness, made of paper.

Their faces are thoroughly Chinese, but wear a certain expression of refinement peculiar to the superior class. They watch us as we pass—gazing at us with something of astonishment mingled with the least touch of irony. Nevertheless, their deportment is essentially

kindly and courteous; but the Asiatic *rictus* remains the same upon all those gentle and distinguished faces of the cultivated class. There is an impassible abyss between that antique Asia, which so persistently endures, and us, who born of yesterday only, have changed the world.

Old twisted trees, old oblique roofs half fallen in, Chinese faces with oblique eyes;—there is affinity between all these. All those remnants, those vestiges of a past flourishing at the epoch of the Deluge, glorious in the times of Sesostris, Cyrus, Alexander, Theodosius and Charlemagne,—ever becoming vaster, while twenty Occidental civilizations have crumbled down, and others have been erected upon their ruins,—all this Antediluvian Orient seems forever making the same old mysterious grimace in the face of our modern Occident.

Orient and Occident—they gaze at one another as the prayer-mill of a Thibetan lama would gaze at a Morse telegraph; they gaze at each other with disdain and pity, as one of those marble lions to be seen at the gates of a *Ya-men* might stare at an Egyptian sphinx;—as an Australian fetish might stare at the gory crucifix of the Holy Inquisition.

And throughout all that heteroclite assemblage called the World, everywhere do the same shrieking discordances confound human reason:—the sacred flame of the Parsee beside the crescent of Mahomet, the divine *Nimboko*, the obscene divinity revered at Nipon, side by side with the subjects of Christian worship—opposition of enigmas, muddle of beliefs, chaos of theogonies—from out whose deep midst towers, icy as death, that materialism begotten

of positive science which simplifies all by suppressing all.

And all that, adored by fifty centuries, was God. . . . Then I think of that All, which now appears to me,—perhaps for the last time,—under a new form, more enigmatic, more strange, more sombre. Is that All *nothing*, really *nothing*?—or is it Something which becomes more remote—which draws away further from us the further our minds extend themselves to grasp it?—and will that Something always continue to draw away further and further from us, into the regions of the Incomprehensible and the Intangible?

Then do I feel the strange and poignant sensation of vast remoteness from some place in which I have never been—of hopeless separation from some one whom I have never known,—of exile from some land which I have never beheld, and which is perhaps *Unknowable*—where I have lived only in dreams, or vaguely and dimly in forgotten limbos of pre-existence. . . .

THE CAPTURE OF TONKIN

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[The name of the *Figaro's* correspondent has been suppressed for obvious reasons, but there is little doubt that it is "Pierre Loti" or Lucien Viaud, the novelist, who is lieutenant on the *Atalante*.]

AUG. 17.—THE squadron assembles in the Bay of Tourane. The attack upon the forts and city of Hué will commence to-morrow. There is no communication with the land. We pass the day in making preparations. The thermometer marks 33° 5 (Cent.) in the wind and in the shade. The high mountains surrounding the bay would recall the Alps, were they not snowless. The city of Tourane is visible upon a long tongue of sand,—a miserable assemblage of low wooden or willow huts.

On board the work begins of equipping the men of the companies selected for the land attack;—each one receives his can, bag, gun-strap, etc.: even the shoes are being tried on. The sailors are as merry as overgrown children at the idea of disembarking to-morrow, and the preparations are absolutely joyful.

Nevertheless, sunstroke and fever have already stricken down several: and some brave lads who were awhile ago all strength and activity, now walk slowly to and fro with strangely pinched and yellow faces.

In the afternoon we see a canoe coming, containing several mandarins clad in black: one of them shaded by an immense white parasol. They are going to confer

with the Admiral, and visit the flag-ship. After a little while they retire precisely as they came.

At 5 p. m. a council of war is held on board the *Bayard*. All the captains attend it. There is a storm, and torrential rain.

The sailors pass the evening in singing, more gaily even than usual. The shrill sounds of a *biniau* are heard, belonging to some Breton sailors.

* * *

SATURDAY, Aug. 18.—At 9 a. m., the whole squadron (*Bayard*, *Atalante*, *Annamite*, *Château-Renaud*, *Drac*, *Lynx* and *Vipère*) file out in line from the Bay of Tourane, under a luminous and splendid day, steam past a legion of fishing-junks with fantastic sails, and make for Hué, capital of Tonkin.

At 2:20, the squadron arrives at the entrance of the Hué River. In the foreground is a sandy beach, sparkling under the sun,—some green-plumed cocoa-palms,—a few houses whose roofs are curved after the Chinese fashion. Only one great fort is visible, guarding the entrance of the river where the sea breaks.

The squadron approaches with precaution, making soundings as it advances; finally casts anchor laying broadsides on, and hoists the French flag preparatory to commencing the bombardment.

The fort replies bravely by hoisting the yellow flag of Annam. One might readily take it for a modern fort, well built and casemated; but no cannons are visible. Some folks make their appearance at the embrasures, like

idle loungers, and stare at us very tranquilly. No doubt the resistance will not be serious, and we expect to see the defenders fly at the first of our cannon shots.

Above the brilliant line of sand, the mountains of Tonquin form a dim background which rises loftily against the sky, darkly outlined against the vast blue light.

* * *

5:30 p.m.—A first shell fired by the *Bayard* gives the signal of battle. It falls directly upon the Annamite fort, raising a huge red whirl of dust and gravel. Then, from all the vessels of the fleet, the bombardment commences,—regular and methodical, each vessel aiming precisely at the point indicated in yesterday's orders. . . . Several minutes have passed; and still no movement is visible on land; certainly the Annamites must all have run away!

But all of a sudden little quick flashes burst from the embrasures of the fort, each followed by a puff of white smoke. It is the *riposte*; we are being fired upon.

It seems they have actually a quantity of cannons: multitudes of little batteries which were echeloned along the coast in the sand, and which are all firing as hard as they can.

But they are all round shots, which do not reach us. They fall short half-way, making eddies in the water. Only the advice boats, which have approached the shore, can be struck;—the iron-clads, far off, watch the balls coming without any anxiety; we see them skipping over

the water, ricochetting like hand-balls, and disappearing on their way.

Soon great red flames begin to rise behind the fort of Thouane-An;—it is a conflagration kindled by our shells beyond—villages on fire. The flames are spreading quickly, and rising very high, together with a thick smoke.

The bombardment continues. In spite of the sea-
roll, which affects our aim, the shells are raining upon the Annamites, upsetting and breaking everything in their way. But the Annamites hold out well, and even quicken their fire. They must certainly be brave.

* * *

7 o'clock in the evening.—Night has almost come: it is now the light of the burning villages that directs our aim. Very heavy clouds are piling up over the mountains of Annam: they form an immense black background, with tongues of lightning playing below. Immediately before us, on a level with the sea, the little bright flashes of the Annamite guns, firing upon us, still continue. A big yellow moon, which rises, dimmed with cloud, partly lights the scene;—it has now become almost impossible to see anything. The admiral gives the signal to cease firing; and all becomes silent again.

But the Annamites answered our fire to the very last moment, with unexpected power of resistance; and the standard of King Tu-Due still floats above the sand.

It is to-morrow morning—Sunday—at daybreak that we are to attempt to storm the forts; portable bridges

and rafts of bamboo have been made; everything is ready. The sailors still maintain their careless gayety;—all but a few reasonable men, who are beginning to feel rather anxious about making this *coup-de-main*, with so small a force, on a coast defended by breakers and covered with cannon and soldiers. On close investigation, it does not seem half as easy as it did yesterday, when we were talking about it at Tourane.

* * *

SUNDAY, Aug. 19.—Everything and everybody is astir at 4 a. m. The storming companies hastily secure their arms, munitions, provisions. Field-guns and the revolving cannons are embarked in the boats.

5:30 a. m.—Counter order from the admiral. The whaling-boats of the fleet went by night to the shore to examine the breakers, and found they were too dangerous to permit our landing to-day. Before the sun rises, the men have disarmed, the war-material has been stowed away; and, as if nothing unusual had occurred, the great traditional Sunday deck-scrubbing begins.

At day-break, the air is so pure that, even at great distances, the least details of things can be distinguished on shore. With telescopes we fathom the rear of Hué River:—great trees, green palms, and, from distance to distance, are visible also the flags of Annam, indicating forts and batteries. We can see nothing, however, of the city, in which it is said that the head of poor Commandant Riviere is still exposed upon the public square, at the summit of a pole.

Now there is a movement of troops on the sand of the beach. Men are leaving the fort of Thouane-An, which we bombarded yesterday—they are dressed in black, and wear high Chinese hats,—white Chinese hats shaped like mushrooms; we can see their weapons shining in the sun;—they are soldiers of King Tu-Due's regular army. They begin to cross the river in a ferry-boat, so as to concentrate on the other side in a fort upon the southern bank. The *Bayard* sends bombs after them;—this causes panics and tumbles into the water; we see them running like madmen over the sand. But the movement still continues; and the Annamite forts begin to return our fire.

This morning, to our great surprise, their projectiles reach us; and come whistling through the air exactly like our own. Evidently they are being fired from *rifled cannon*. The Annamites had no rifled cannon yesterday; they must have brought them up during the night. A shot passes through the topmast of the *Vipere*; another smashes in the smokestack of the *Bayard*, and strikes a sailor in the chest. Then, at a signal from the Admiral, the general bombardment begins again.

There is no rolling to-day; the guns of the squadron, well-pointed, bear directly upon the Annamite batteries, which must soon be silenced. At every shot we see whirlwinds of sand and stones arise. The Annamite fire does not endure ten minutes. In half an hour we cease our own, as there is no answering fire from the shore.

It is eleven o'clock. This will be a day of rest for the sailors, who really need it; the familiar whistle is

sounded, — *All hands free! — amuse yourselves!* The batteries of the squadron, soiled with powder, smoke, and the dirty water of the cannon-sponges, have not their wonted aspect, their joyous Sunday cleanliness; but there is a nice sea-breeze to-day, not too warm, and gratefully respirable. Instead of amusing themselves, however, the sailors, fatigued by several days of excessive work and long night watches, mostly lie right down upon the deck and sleep. The ironclads became silent as huge dormitories.

At eight o'clock in the evening, there is another council of war on board the *Bayard*. The breakers have gone down considerably; the Annamite forts, having been twice bombarded, cannot be in a condition to offer much resistance:—it is decided therefore that the force disembark to-morrow, and the sailors go to bed very early in order to have a little sleep before the general call, which is to be made at four o'clock in the morning.

The officers of the expedition are appointed in advance according to certain rules of precedence based upon their terms of service, and their positions on board;—those who must remain on the vessels to superintend the manœuvres and the service of the batteries have been thus prepared in advance for the privation, and accept it without a murmur.

As for the sailors, they have more right to dispute the honor; and several “topmen” who were not at first designated to take part in the assault, have succeeded to-day in inducing less giddy tars to act as substitutes on board. To-morrow morning the plan will be to seize the

whole left bank of the Hué River, which is the most strongly fortified part of the position. Independently of the little batteries planted here and there in the sand, there is the great circular southern fort, which commands the entrance of the river with forty cannon-embrasures;—then there is the rice-magazine battery; and lastly, further up to the northwest, the last northern fort. All these have been more or less damaged by shells; but they have been doubtless repaired during the night, and will be able to open fire again to-morrow morning.

A splendid night. The ships of the fleet sweep the coast with great streams of electric light which must frighten the Annamites considerably. During all this time, the French whale-boats are sounding the entrance of the river, and exploring the breaker-line of the beach.

* * *

MONDAY, Aug. 20.—Four o'clock in the morning: up all hammocks. It is still thick night. The men who are to go ashore breakfast in haste, arm, prepare their munitions and provisions for two days. A few hand-shakes, a few little recommendations, between those who go and those who stay;—then the men take their places in the boats. All the guns of the fleet are directed upon the coast preparing to fire.

5:30 a. m. — At daybreak the French flags are hoisted at every mast-head; the uproar of the bombardment commences. There is no reply from the shore. The sand-dunes make a white line against the horizon;

the mountains of Annam stand out above it, against the brightening sky, in lofty outlines of violet.

5:50.—All the flotilla of boats move. The day is very clear,—absolutely calm. The sun rises through little golden-colored clouds. Daylight comes all at once, as is the general rule in tropical countries. All the details of the mountains become accentuated in tints of rose and blue. Above the dunes are now to be seen green cocoa-palms, batteries, villages, pagodas, houses whose roofs are ornamented with carved open-work. Nothing moves there; and our shells seem to be falling upon an abandoned region.

6:20 a.m.—The companies of the *Bayard* and *Atalante* reach the shore, and commence to land right among the breakers—getting a little wet in the attempt. A moment of anxiety. From the ships of the squadron we can plainly see lines of Annamite heads peeping above the dunes;—but the sailors who are disembarking cannot see them. The Annamites seem to be lying in wait there for our sailors,—hiding in trenches. Our nearest vessel, the *Lynx*, suddenly fires a salvo into the Annamites, which seems to prostrate some twenty of them: the others immediately crouch down behind their trenches.

The disembarkment is taking place near the North fort, right opposite a village. All of a sudden, from behind the dunes, comes a shower of flaming grenades, with round-shot and grape. . . . Nobody is hurt. The fire-balls are almost inoffensive; they seem to fall quite gently upon the sand, like little meteors. Now the sailors climb the dunes at a run, find the Annamites scarcely

armed, fire upon them, knock them down with the butt-ends of their rifles as if it were good fun. All the yellow band is in full flight. Perhaps a thousand men are running away from that handful of sailors. Now the company of the *Atalante* is charging the North fort. Some Annamites come out of it, advance, fire a volley without killing anybody,—then wheel about, and take to their heels.

6:40 a.m.—The *Atalante's* men are in the North fort. The Annamite flag is pulled down, and the French flag hoisted in its place by Naval Lieutenant Poidloue, commanding the force. The sailors are pursuing the Annamites in a northwestwardly direction.

7 o'clock.—The field-guns and the first company of marine infantry are landing. The boats return for a second transportation. A new Annamite battery suddenly opens fire, from behind a sand hill, at the *Vipere*, which immediately answers it. The sailors have set fire to the north village, which is beginning to blaze up.

7:30.—The Annamite battery established at the rice-magazine opens fire. The sailors have ignited a second conflagration;—this one is magnificent!—village, pagoda, all burn with huge red flames and great whirls of smoke.

7:40.—The second convoy of marine infantry lands;—all the artillery is disembarked, and advanced to the summit of the sand-dunes. The French troops are massing, perpendicularly to the beach, facing south,—preparing to march against the great forts.

7:50.—A conflagration is kindled by the shells of the squadron in the circular south fort. All the French

troops are now massed; the field-artillery opens fire upon the forts. In the north, all the houses are burning.

8 o'clock.—The French troops divide, and advance south.

8:35.—The first French division, small in numbers, arrives before the rice-magazine battery, and open a rapid fire.

8:40.—They retire a few paces, and find shelter;—the circular fort is firing upon them. The squadron increases the rapidity of the bombardment.

8:45.—Now the marines signal from the land to the flag-ship,—by means of steerage-flags hoisted upon a pole,—“*Stop fire upon the forts.*” The flag-ship replies by signaling to the whole fleet: “*Stop fire.*”

8:50.—A momentary heart-sinking for those who watch the scene from on board . . . the Annamites suddenly issue in large numbers from the rice magazine, and fire a rapid volley upon the advanced French forces, which retire and throw themselves flat upon the sand.

8:55.—We commence to breathe again. All the French marines have risen to their feet. Beyond a doubt none of them are wounded; for they all run at the Annamites without giving them time to reload. Simultaneously reinforcements of sailors and marines attack the Annamites in the rear. They fly southwardly, and take refuge in a clump of houses over which their flag is flying. The French run after them.

9 o'clock.—We cannot see very well what is going on among those houses and trees. A very heavy fusillade is audible, and the Annamite flag falls. The French con-

tinue to run forward toward the circular South fort. The sun is mounting high, and the heat is becoming terrible.

9:05.—We hear the French artillery, which has arrived at Thouane-An (the last Southern village), open fire close by the circular fort. All of a sudden the village of Thouane-An lights up and commences to blaze like an immense straw-fire.

9:10.—The French have entered the great circular fort from two sides at once: it has already been filled with corpses by our shells. The last Annamites who sought refuge there run away, tumble headlong from the walls, they run like madmen; some try to swim away, others try to pass the river in boats, or to ford it to the southern bank. The French who have now mounted upon the walls of the fort, fire upon them from above, almost touching them with the muzzles of their guns; and bring them down by wholesale. Those in the water innocently try to protect themselves with mats, wickerwork shields, bucklers of sheet-iron: the French rifle balls pass through all. The Annamites fall in groups, with their arms outspread;—in less than five minutes three or four hundred of them have been literally mown down by the *feux rapides* and *feu de salve*. The marines stop firing, through pity, and allow the rest to escape; there will be quite enough corpses to remove from the fort this evening before the hour of rest.

The great yellow flag of Annam, which has been floating for two days, is pulled down, and the French flag hoisted in its place. It is all over—the whole northern bank is captured, swept clean, burned out. On the whole

it was a joyful and glorious morning, everything admirably managed.

Of the Annamites nearly 600 dead strew the roads and villages,—their heads riddled with balls, or their breasts stoven in by bayonet thrusts. On our side, scarcely 10 wounded,—no dead, not even one desperate wound.

9:15.—The flagship *Bayard* orders her men up in the yards, to cheer. All the vessels of the squadron follow suit:—"Hurrah!"

* * *

And then calm falls everywhere. We can now rest until evening.—The men on shore ask for wine and water, which is sent them—then they seek the shade.

We were admirably situated on board for observing all the movements of the attack, as from a height. We had almost a bird's eye view. Now through our marine-glasses we can observe the details on shore—the costumes, attitudes, episodes.

* * *

. . . . A sailor is strutting gravely up and down on the beach, under a mandarin's big parasol. . . . An Annamite, who has been lying on the sand, pretending to be dead, is suddenly perceived by another sailor who is carrying a barrel. The sailor stands over the Annamite, and threatens him with his finger,—just as we threaten children. The Annamite rises to his knees,—humbly performs *tchin tchin*, and kisses the sailor's feet, begging for mercy. The sailor is a good-natured fellow, and allows himself to be touched—"only, *par exemple!* you shall carry

my barrel for me!" He places the barrel on the Annamite's shoulders, and makes him follow him, like a groom.

There is not a breath of air. The overwhelming heat of noon commences to weigh upon everything. The motionless sea flashes and flings off the heat from its surface, like a mirror. The line of sand dunes gleams under the sun with a whiteness that hurts the eye to look at; two or three Annamite corpses are outlined against it; pigs and sheep, flying from the fire, run over them;—a poor dog, who has no doubt lost his master, is running to and fro as if he had also lost his head. Behind the sands, the mountains of Annam are paling under a sort of warm vapor; and the blue of the sky seems tarnished by the heat. Now there is no sound. Only the villages are still burning with very long and very red flames;—their smoke rises perfectly straight to an astonishing height, so calm is the air;—in the midst of all that dazzling blue light, it seems like giant pillars of blackness.

* * *

About 3 o'clock in the afternoon, there is another little cannonade. The squadron has changed its position, and has posted itself directly in front of the river's mouth. The Annamite forts upon the Southern bank are firing upon the *Vipère* and the *Lynx*, which have anchored close to the bar, so as to cross it to-morrow morning. The squadron replies, and the fire ceases.

The night is absolutely calm. All along the coast, we see the light of the Annamite villages, which blaze under the moon until daybreak.

THE MASSACRE OF THE ANNAMITES

THE MASSACRE OF THE ANNAMITES

Reprinted in "FIGURES ET CHOSES."

Le Figaro, October 15-17, 1883.

"*The New Orleans Times-Democrat*", November 4, 1883.

[The second letter of Pierre Loti is unfortunately too long for reproduction in our columns, as the whole of it would occupy more than a page of THE TIMES-DEMOCRAT. We select a few impressive passages. The *Figaro* announces that Pierre Loti's letters will be reproduced in book form this winter.—T.]

. . . . IN the glow of the morning light, which was cool and blue, the flames of the conflagration were of an extraordinarily red tinge: they were not bright, but dark like blood. We watched them writhing, blending, hastily licking up all in their path; the smoke, intensely black, gave forth an acrid and musky stench. It seemed natural enough at first to see the red tongues of fire running over the roofs of the pagodas,—in the midst of all their architectural devilries of claws outspread, forked tails, and barbed darts. But all the little monsters of plaster suddenly began to crepitate, to burst asunder, casting out to right and left their porcelain scales, their wicked ball-crystal eyes, and they sank down at last with the falling beams, into the yawning recesses of the sanctuaries.

[*Here follows the account of the massacre as cabled to The Times-Democrat.*]

. . . . There is already a suffocating heat, a deadly glare upon these sands; the great smoke columns of the burning villages still mount up very straight to a prodigious height, and then spread themselves out against the sky, like enormous parasols.

There is nobody left to kill. Then the sailors, giddy with the glare of the sun, and the sounds of the engagement, leave the fort and rush upon the wounded with a sort of nervous trembling. Those who, panting with fear, lay hidden in holes,—those who feigned death, as they lay covered with mats,—those already at their last gasp who held up their hands to beg for mercy,—shrieking *Han! Han!* . . . all these the sailors killed, riddling them with bayonet thrusts, breaking their skulls with the butt-ends of their rifles.

Little boys from Saigon, effeminate and ferocious, Annamite domestics who had followed the infantry, accompanied the sailors, and called them whenever they succeeded in discovering some unfortunate hidden in a corner; the boys would pull the men by the sleeve, saying: "Monsieur, here is another one over here;—there's another one over there! Come quick, Monsieur—give him *pan, pan, pan!*"

The sailors were no longer recognizable; they had become mad. Efforts were made to restrain them. They were told repeatedly: "Ah, my friends, that is dirty, cowardly work."

They would answer—"Why those are savages, Captain! Didn't they carry Commandant Riviere's head through their city at the top of a stick?"

—"You call those fellows men, Captain? Why, if they'd beaten us, you know they'd have cut us in pieces alive, or sawed us in two between planks."

There was no answer to that—it was true,—and the men were left to their dark work.

After all, such are the laws of war in the further East. And when a civilized power seeks with a mere handful of men to impose her laws upon an immense country, the enterprise is so hazardous that it is necessary to slay many and to strike terror abroad,—under pain of failure.

* * *

By noon nearly all the men of the *Atalante* had gradually mustered at the little fort which they were to occupy by orders of the Admiral until next day. They were greatly exhausted by fatigue, nervous excitement and thirst. The pink dunes reflected an insufferable glare under that perpendicular sun;—the light descended vertically and dazzlingly, and the shadows of the men who stood upon the sand did not extend beyond their feet.

And the great land of Annam, which appeared to us on the other side of the lagoon, seemed an Eden, with its lofty blue mountains, its cool and deeply-wooded valleys. We dreamed of that vast city of Hue, lying behind those curtains of verdure,—now left almost undefended, and doubtless full of mysterious treasures. We would probably advance upon it to-morrow, and then the real fun would begin.

Dinner-hour came and preparations were made for a light campaign-meal upon ship provisions. Luckily we had found, a short distance from the fort, the portable house of a military mandarin, who had fled the evening before—a sort of immense cabin, all of bamboos and reeds,—in fine lattice-work, very graceful and extremely

light. It was conveyed to headquarters, together with its easy chairs and its rattan benches; and we found ourselves well protected within from the burning sun.

Unpleasant surprise!—the wine proved short in spite of the formal order of the admirals and the commander of the *Atalante*. Nobody could explain why or wherefore. . . . We made the best of what we had, put a little more water than usual into the tin cans, and had quite a pleasant dinner all the same.

All the men had picked up something—lances, Annamese garments, chaplets of *sapecks*, and many had wound about their waists beautiful bands of woven stuffs dyed with bright Chinese colors. Sailors always have a liking for belts or sashes. They assumed triumphal airs, strutted about under magnificent parasols, or played negligently with fans and waved fly-flaps made of colored feathers.

* * *

With the soothing effects of shade and of rest, calm returned to these young heads; the reaction followed, the men became themselves again, feeling sickened at the thought that they could have been so cruel.

One of them, hearing a wounded Annamite moaning, went out to make him drink his own portion of wine and water, from his own tin can.

The conflagration of the village died down gradually;—only a few red flames were visible here and there, playing through black heaps of rubbish. Three or four houses had escaped; and two pagodas were still standing. The

pagoda nearest the fort, as it finished burning, had suddenly spread abroad a suave perfume of balm and incense.

The sailors had all left their bamboo shelter. Although still slightly fatigued, and almost blinded by the light, they wandered about for two hours under that dangerous sun,—still looking for wounded Annamites, but this time only in order to give them drink, to bring them boiled rice, to make them as comfortable as possible on the sand. They got Chinese hats to protect the wounded men's heads with; they got mats and made with them little screens to protect the disabled victims from the intense heat. And those yellow men who devise such refinements of torture for their own prisoners, gazed at them with eyes dilated by surprise and astonishment;—they made weak gestures of thankfulness with their poor trembling hands;—now they might venture to utter the moans which ease pain, to give free vent to that dismal "*Han! . . . Han!*" which they had repressed all the morning, in the hope they might be taken for dead.

But there were corpses already frightful to look at,—corpses of men on whom the bayonets had wreaked their worst fury,—eyes out, the body all riddled, all covered with stabs, all full of holes. And great ox-flies were already settling upon them. . . .

THE BURIAL OF A SAILOR

THE BURIAL OF A SAILOR

From "MON FRÈRE YVES."

"*The New Orleans Times-Democrat*", November 11, 1883.

. . . . A GREAT new plank was posed crosswise over the netting, projecting and rocking above the sea; and from below a weird-looking thing had been brought up, which seemed very heavy,—a sheath of gray canvass betraying the form of a human body.

When Barazere had been laid upon the new plank, swaying above the foaming waves, all the caps of all the sailors were doffed for the last salute; a helmsman recited a prayer;—hands made the sign of the cross;—and then at my command, the plank rocked, and there was heard the dead sound of a great splash in the waters.

La Primauguet continued her rapid course; and the body of Barazere fell into that gulf, immense in profundity and in extent, which is the Great Ocean.

And still we looked into the wake behind us with anxiety; for sometimes it happens, if the sharks be there, that a stain of blood rises to the surface.

But no!—nothing reappeared; he had descended in peace into the profundities below.

Infinite descend—swift at first as a fall; then slow, slower, gradually slackening as the strata of waters become denser and denser. Mysterious voyage of leagues into abysses unknown;—where the darkening sun wears the likeness of a wan moon—then grows green, and trembles, and goes out forever. And then it is that the

eternal darkness begins; the waters mount, mount, heaping themselves above the head of the voyager, even as a deluge-tide rising to the stars.

But, below, the fallen corpse has lost all its horror. Matter, in the absolute sense, is never unclean. In the unknown dimness the invisible creatures of the deeper waters gather about it; mysterious madrepores will advance their branches toward it—will eat it slowly, very slowly, with the thousand little mouths of their living flowers.

The sepulture of the sailor may never be violated by human hand. He who hath descended so far to sleep is more dead than any other dead. Never again will aught of him mingle itself with that ancient dust of humanity, which, at the surface of the world, perpetually seeks to reform, ever recombines in eternal effort to live again. He belongs to the *underlife*; he shall pass into strange plants of stone which are colorless—into slow-moving creatures that are without form and without eyes. . . .

A SAILOR'S FROLIC

A SAILOR'S FROLIC

From "MON FRÈRE YVES."

"*The New Orleans Times-Democrat*", December 9, 1883.

. . . . "I FEEL as much at home in these as a rabbit would in gaiters," said Yves with a childish air, as he contemplated his pagoda-sleeves and his Burmese robe of blue silk.

It was at Yé, a city of Siam, on the shores of the Bengal Gulf. He was sitting at the further end of a sailor's tavern, upon a stool of Chinese form.

He was very drunk; and when he had thus smiled to find himself clad like an Asiatic grandee, his eyes again became sombre and dull, his lips compressed and scornful. In such moods, he was capable of anything—just as in other days.

Beside him sat the tall Kerboul, foretopman on the *Medee*, who had just had brought to him fifteen glasses of a Singapore brandy that is very costly,—had emptied them one after the other, and then smashed them with his fist, with the terrible seriousness of Breton drunkenness. And the fragments of those fifteen glasses covered the table, upon which he had placed his feet.

Then there was Barrada, the cannoneer, handsome and cool as usual,—smiling his feline smile. The topmen had given him an exceptional invitation to their frolic. And then there were Le Hello, Barazère, six mainmast and six bowsprit men—all strutting in Asiatic robes and putting on superb airs.

There was even Le Hir, the idiot, from l'Ile de Sein, whom they had brought along with them to make them laugh. . . . Finally there were two outlaws, two scall-wags, deserters from the flags of all nations,—but old acquaintances of Yves, who had tenderly picked them up from the beach that very evening.

It was to celebrate the festival of Sainte Epissoire,* special patron saint of topmen, that they had assembled there; and polite usage compelled me to accompany them, as officer of manœuvres.

It was a whole year since they had last set foot upon the land. And the commander, who was very well satisfied with his crew, had permitted the best among them to celebrate the anniversary of this great saint after the French fashion. He had selected the city of Yé by preference, because it had seemed to him the least dangerous—as the people there were more inoffensive than in most other places, and more *manageable*.

* * *

In that hall, which was vast and low, with walls of paper, there were also a band of sailors from some American merchant-vessel, drinking with women. . . . These intruders annoyed our topmen, who wanted to be alone, and gave the others to understand as much in very plain words.

Eleven o'clock.—The candles have been renewed in the colored girandoles; while the Siamese city sinks to

* This saint is probably only known in the French navy—for the name does not appear in the Breton Calendar (1883), which is full of extraordinary saints, nor in the *Calendrier Populaire*, issued by the Folklorists—T.

slumber without, under the warm night. Within the tavern one feels there are fisticuffs in the very air; that arms are nervous with desire to stretch themselves, to "let loose" and strike.

—"Who are they, what are they?" said one of the American crew who had a decided Marseilles accent—"what are these Frenchmen who propose to make law here? And that one with them [*myself*], the youngest, who puts on airs, and pretends to command them?" . . .

. . . . "That one!"—growled Yves, with the mien of a man who does not even deign to turn his head,— "that one!—it will need somebody with moustaches to lay a finger on him."

. . . . "That one!" cried Barrada—"did you ask who he is? . . . Just wait a bit!—we're going to show you who he is, without giving him any trouble,—and we shall see, my boys, whether the lightning strikes you!" . . .

Yves had already flung his Chinese stool at them: it broke the wall close to their heads. Barrada, with one powerful blow, capsized two; and the rest, flung headlong on top of the first victims were soon in a heap upon the floor;—and Kerboul smashed the table over the struggling mass, with tremendous blows, scattering the fragments of his fifteen brandy glasses over the prostrate enemy. . . .

* * *

Then were heard without sounds of gongs and of little bells, rustlings of silk,—the thin sharp laughter of women.

And the dancing-girls came in. (The sailors had ordered dancing-girls.)

But all paused in silence as they entered; for they were strange! . . . Painted like Chinese images,—covered with gold and with jewelry,—their eyes half-closed, so as to seem like narrow white slits,—they advanced into our midst with smiles as of dead women; extending their arms in air, and spreading open their thin fingers whose long nails were enclosed within sheaths of gold.

And with the dancers came odors of insense and of balm,—small sticks of perfume were being burnt in a chafing-dish; and a languor-inspiring smoke spread itself like a blue cloud.

The gongs resounded more violently, and those phantoms began to dance—keeping their feet motionless, executing a species of rhythmic movement of loins and stomach, accompanied with twistings and turnings of the wrist. Ever the same fixed smile,—always the same white corpse-stare!—it seemed that only a part of those bodies lived:—the heavy, curving, ghoulis loins, agitated by strange quiverings,—and then, at the end of those stiffened arms, those outspread hands also,—those weird hands that writhed.

. . . . Le Hello, who had long before sunk to sleep upon the floor, was awakened by the loud rolling of the gongs,—and saw,—and was afraid. . . .

—“*Te pardi!*—it’s only the dancing girls,” cried the jeering Barrada, laughing at him.

—“Ah! yes . . . the dancing girls!”

He had risen staggering to his feet,—and groping

dizzily in the air, with his huge hand, he strove to strike down all those extended arms and gilded claws,—stuttering in his drink-thickened speech :

—“Mustn’t mustn’t . . . old Fire-screen Face . . . mustn’t show your hands like that . . . it’s ugly ! . . . I thought ’twas . . . ’twas . . . ’twas the devil !”

And he fell back upon the floor to sleep again.

As for Barrada, who had taken more than his customary dose that night, he reproached them with having yellow skins, and told them about his own, which was white. “*White—white,*” he reiterated wearisomely,—boasting about his own color, which he really exaggerated, but which he was determined to make them see—showing them first his arms, then his breast, . . .

But they, those yellow dolls of Asia, only continued their slow and lugubrious tremors,—ever preserving the mystery of their rictus and of their long eyes, drawn upward toward their temples. And Barrada danced before them . . . like a Greek marble that had suddenly assumed life in order to share in some Bacchanalian revel. . . .

But those Burmese women, who seemed wound up like automata, danced a long, long time,—much longer than he could dance. And afterward, at the end of the night the sailors became seized with a strange terror at the sight of those beings. . . . One by one the seamen stole away from the hall, and made for the beach. . . .

* * *

. . . . Soon the Burmese women came to dance about the hammock of the slumbering Yves. In the

midst of the cloud of incense, rendered more shadowy by dreams, they seemed, one after the other, to float toward him,—to bend above him,—smiling their dead smile—all robed in strange costumes of silk, all covered with precious stones.

Softly they balanced themselves upon their hips, to the sound of the gong,—keeping their hands in air, spreading out their fingers like phantoms. Their wrists seemed to be contorted epileptically—intertangling their long claws enclosed within sheaths of gold.

But the sound of the gong was the thunder of the tempest without—of the waves beating against the walls of the ship.

* * *

AT MONTEVIDEO

The first circumstance that drew us together was at Montevideo,—one morning,—before daybreak.

Yves had been on shore ever since the evening before; and I came to the quay, in a boat manned by sixteen seamen, to obtain a supply of fresh water.

I can well remember the cool half-light of that morning,—that sky, half-luminous and still full of stars,—that deserted quay along which we rowed leisurely, seeking the watering-place,—and the great city, which had a false European look, together with something indescribably savage of its own.

As we passed by, we saw the streets—long, straight, immense,—open one after the other against the whitening sky. At that vague hour, when the night was about to end, there were no more lights, no more sounds;—from

time to time, only, we beheld afar off, some homeless wanderer moving to and fro with hesitating gait;—along the sea were dangerous taverns,—huge frame buildings, redolent of spices and alcohol, but all closed up and black like tombs.

We stopped before one which was called the *Posada de la Independencia*.

The sound of Spanish song came to us from the interior, as if muffled;—one door half yawned upon the street;—two men without were fighting with knives;—there was a drunken woman too, whom we could hear vomiting close by the wall. Upon the quay were great heaps of hides—the hides of freshly-flayed cattle from the pampas,—infecting the pure and delicious air with a venison-odor. . . .

Suddenly a very singular convoy issued from the tavern: four men carrying another, who seemed to be very drunk—totally unconscious. They hurried toward the ships, as though afraid of us.

We knew the old game, commonly practised in the evil resorts of that coast,—to get sailors drunk, then make them sign some senseless engagement, and then to ship them by force when they are no longer able to keep their legs. As soon as possible the ship is got ready for sea; and when the sailor comes to his senses again, the vessel is far on her way. He finds himself captive, under a yoke of iron; he is taken along, like a slave, to join in the whale-fisheries,—far from any inhabited land. Once there, no danger of his escaping;—for he is a *deserter*, on the testimony of his own handwriting. . . .

Now the convoy we saw looked very suspicious. The men hurried on their way, like robbers escaping with booty; and I said to the sailors,—“*Run at them!*”

Forthwith the four men let their burthen fall heavily to the ground, and ran away as fast as their legs could carry them.

The burthen was Yves Kermadec. While we were occupied in picking him up and identifying him, we had suffered the others to escape;—they had barricaded themselves within the tavern. The sailors wanted to smash in the doors and take the place by assault; but that might have provoked diplomatic complications with Uruguay.

Moreover Yves was saved; and that was the essential point. We laid him down in the boat, upon our waterskins, well-wrapped up in a mantle, and so conveyed him to the man-of-war.

* * *

THE EQUATORIAL SEA

. . . . It was hot, hot,—and the light had surprising splendor,—and the lifeless sea was of a milky blue, the color of molten turquoise.

But when those thick strange clouds,—which traveled over the waters, hanging so low as almost to touch them,—passed over us, they brought night-blackness with them, and inundated us with deluge-rains.

Now we were right under the equator; and it seemed as though there was not the faintest breath of air to aid us in getting away.

Those darknesses and those heavy rains would last for hours, sometimes for a whole day. Then Yves and

his friends would assume what they were pleased to term "savage attire," and sit down under the warm shower, and let the rain pour upon them.

This always ended very suddenly;—one saw the black curtain passing away slowly, resuming its trailing march over the turquoise-colored sea; and the splendid light would reappear more astonishing than ever after those long darknesses; and the great equatorial sun would very quickly drink up all the water that had fallen upon us;—the sails, the woodwork, the awnings would soon recover their whiteness under that glow;—the *Sibylle* resumed her clear dry tint in the centre of the great blue monotony extending round about us.

From the mizzen-top, where Yves usually dwelt, one could see that the blue water was limitless; there was no end to those liquid deeps;—one felt how far, far was that horizon, that last water-line,—although whether near or far it always seemed the same, always the same sharpness, the same color, the same mirror-gleam. And then one could become aware of that *curve* of the world, which alone prevented the eye from seeing still further.

At sunset, there were in the air something like vaults, formed by long successions of little golden clouds: their retreating perspectives stretched away, smaller and smaller, to lose themselves in the distant void; the eye followed them until the brain became dizzy:—it was like a vision of temple-naves,—the naves of an endless apocalyptic temple. And everything was so clear and pure that the view of these deeps of heaven was interrupted only by the sky-line;—the last tiny clouds of gold made a tangent

with the water-line, and seemed, in the distance, as fine as the hatchings of an engraving.

Sometimes again, there were simply long bands of clouds traversing the sky, gold overlying gold;—the clouds themselves being of a clear, incandescent gold, against a background of dead and tarnished Byzantine gold. Below the sea would take a singular shade of peacock-blue, with gleams as of hot metal. Then all this would pass away, would extinguish itself in deep limpities, in shadowy colors for which no name can be found.

And the nights which came after! The very nights were luminous. When everything slumbered in heavy immobility, in dead silence, the stars above appeared more dazzling than in any other region of the globe.

And the sea also glowed from below. There was a sort of vast gleam diffused through the waters. The faintest movements,—that of the ship in her sluggish course,—that of the shark turning in our wake,—created glow-worm-colored lights in the warm eddies. And then, over the great phosphorescent mirror of the sea, thousands of wildfires were playing,—as if little lamps, mysterious little lamps, were everywhere lighting themselves to burn a few seconds, and then die down. Those nights were faint with heat, full of phosphorus; and all that extinguished Immensity was hatching light; and all those waters enclosed latent life in rudimentary form,—even as did, of old, the gloomy waters of the primitive world.

ANNAMESE PICTURES

ANNAMESE PICTURES

From "MON FRÈRE YVES."

"The New Orleans Times-Democrat", October 12, 1884

[The following extracts are made from one of a series of inimitable sketches contributed to a leading Paris review.]

It is early morning, in Annam, in one of the bays of that coast. Our vessel is anchored out at sea. My duty calls me away from her to some little town which must be over there beyond the shore-line, and which is called Tourane.

I am ordered to capture the chief mandarin and bring him on board to make his visit of submission, so that friendly relations may be established with the people of the province that we have been sent to look after.

The bay is beautiful and vast. It is surrounded by very dark mountains, except at the further end, where there is only a strip of perfectly flat sand,—like a bit of some other country placed there to complete the landscape, for want of something better.

And it is somewhere in that further background that we are to find Tourane, on the bank of a river whose entrance we have not yet been able to discover.

Six topmen, whom I was allowed to select myself, accompany me on the expedition. True seamen all, thoroughbred, and excellently armed,—enough to bully a whole Asiatic city.

It is dawn when we start in the long-boat.

The summits of the mountains have entangled clouds

which form sombre domes above them; heavy masses of darkness are heaped high above our heads.

On the other hand, over there, beyond the low-lying lands we are approaching, there is the deep and luminous void of heaven. There is also an incongruous thing which shows its silhouette far away;—that is the “Mountain of Marble” which is not like any other mountain;—its form is absolutely unique; and it towers all alone, on the plain. Very intense in color, it wears an abnormal aspect there, in the midst of the sands,—too huge to be a ruin, too fantastic to seem a mountain. One does not know which it most resembles. It is the one thing we look at;—the extraordinary characteristic,—the *chinoiserie* of the country.

After an hour’s travel, the land is naturally much nearer to us. We are able to perceive details that at first seem commonplace enough,—a long range of low, regular dunes, with trees just like our own. Now we are able to distinguish the mouth of the river,—a pass between two sandy points, with a little house standing at the entrance.

The scene assumes a look like that of the low coasts of the Gulf of Gascogne,—of Saintonge for instance;—it is quite easy to fancy that we are entering some little French port. From time to time, it is pleasant to entertain such an illusion when the illusion presents itself.

But as we draw nearer the little house becomes strange, grimacing; the curved lines of its roof begin to bristle with all sorts of ugly devilish things; the roof has horns and claws, and bears on its middle the great lotus-

flower of the pagodas. . . . Ah! . . . that is Buddha;—that is further Asia. And then the idea of our exile and of enormous distance comes back to us all at once,—just as we had commenced to forget it.

All about the silent old pagoda pallid aloe-plants thrust out their spikes, like malevolent things. There are perfume-pans set here and there upon little frail benches,—which are Buddhist altars. A square-shaped wall-surface is placed right at the edge of the water before everything,—like a screen to mask the path to the sanctuary:—it bears the colored bas-relief of a night-marish beast,—coiled and clawed, baring its fangs in a ferocious snarl. Upon the frieze a long and frightful bat extends its wings of stone, and puts out at us a red-painted tongue. On the ground a porcelain tortoise lifts its head and stares at us; and other very small monsters make their appearance also,—all immobile, in watchful postures, gathered up upon themselves as if about to make a bound. All this creation is old,—gnawed by time, devoured by mold,—but exceedingly animated in attitude and maleficent expression,—seeming to say: “We are Spirits who have long guarded this river-entrance, and we cast evil spells upon all who pass by” . . .

* * *

[Every line of the sixteen pages from which we make these extracts is worth translating; but we are obliged to confine ourselves to a few carefully chosen passages for lack of space.]

* * *

. . . . Among the intensely green shrubs upon the banks, some bear white flowers, ivory-white, with the milky aspect of tuberose; others are covered with red bouquets, the color of ardent flame, with very long pistils bursting out in clusters. These are like little Chinese fireworks exploding here and there amidst the foliage.

There are immense butterflies, huge and extraordinary insects wandering among the flowers,—a great many absolutely black butterflies, flying crookedly in somersaults, as if incapable of directing those too-heavy wings of theirs that seem to be made of black velvet. . . .

And this land smells of musk, like all further Asia. The more we advance into the interior, the more strongly perceptible it becomes,—that heavy musky smell, together with all exhalations of plants and human refuse warmed by the torrid sun.

Now we pass by junks with high prows. Each has two painted eyes, and their bows imitate the head of a fish. All the fishing population is there, cooking their stinking repast of rice and shellfish over small furnaces of earthenware. Naked children, all yellow from head to foot, with long hair, swarm and crawl all over these barques,—perching upon the oars, upon the spars,—assuming the craziest and most inimical attitudes, as they watch us pass. There are some tiny ones, but just born, who hold their arms akimbo, and bulge out their abdomens,—imitable in their pose of defiance.

. . . . On landing we feel at once an impression of heavier heat; the light bamboos fling sifted shade, quiver-

ing like that of a Chinese window-blind,—a warm shade which gives neither rest nor coolness.

* * *

. . . . In Tourane there are almost as many pagodas as there are houses. My sailors call them Chapels of the Black Mass. Old liliputian pagodas in which five or six persons could hardly find standing-room by reason of all the grotesques within. It seems as though dreams of hell had been materialized for the special purpose of ornamenting them; frights and hideousnesses of all kinds are painted, engraven or carved upon the walls and roofs; festoons of crabs and scorpions,—snarls of annulated worms that have the soft look of larvæ,—large caterpillars with claws and horns and ferocious eyes that seem to roll,—small monsters, half-dogs-half-devils, all grinning with the same uninterpretable grin. Devouring suns, the salty mists of the sea, the mighty destroying breath of typhoons, have wasted their force in seeking to obliterate those things,—in cracking them,—in disjoining them. Under the gray dust of centuries they still preserve an aspect of intense life;—they rise up, rear, bristle, squint horribly toward the entrance, as though about to leap in a paroxysm of fury, at whoever might dare to come in.

All around are little garden-plots of sand, in which strange plants swoon with excess of heat and light;—and empty inclosed spaces also, guarded by other indefinable beasts grimacing death. And always those great screens of stone placed along the edges of the walks, and covered with *diableries* that give one the cold shivers.

Within the pagodas it is all decrepit antiquity;—dust and saltpetre are devouring the idols and the mother-of-pearl inscriptions upon the walls. In the sombre sanctuary glimmers a little watch-light, dimly illuminating whole regiments of monsters with worm-eaten beards. One smells an odor of incense, a stench of cavern-mold;—and further back, upon an altar, in the obscurity, Buddha, corpulent, obscene, seems about to burst asunder with laughter and happiness between his symbolical herons and tortoises.

. . . . Without, the vast light seizes upon us again, more dazzling than ever. Descending upon our white hats, it is like a fire that scorches our temples,—or a sharp pain which from time to time seems to attack the whole head at once. And everywhere that scent of musk and filth, heavy to inhale, which hangs in the air. . . .

. . . .

. . . . We come once more to the turn of the river at its mouth, before the pagoda which guards the entrance. The place is silent, inundated with light. The ancient devilries, immobile upon their sandy domain, within their hedges of aloes, make the same grimaces at us, the same ferocious grins, as we pass by. And then the bay opens before us in all its vastness,—a sheet of resplendent pale-blue water,—an immense sun-reflector over which not one breath of air passes. There is not now a single trace of the clouds which hung darkly above the dawn;—they have crumbled and melted away in that burning air. The distant mountains, that advance into the sea to form

capas, are so pointed, so regularly hewn out, that they wear a veritable Chinese look;—but it now seems as if they had sunk a little,—as if they also had melted down a little under the dazzling brightness of the hour, and that the bay has become larger. And our ship is very far, alas!—its gray silhouette, lifted up by the mirage, seems almost resting upon the horizon itself. Two hours at the oar, in that hot sea, under that terrible sun which is steadily ascending. . . .

But how suddenly it has become peopled, this bay, which was all void when we crossed it upon our advent! Astounding it is to behold the multitude of sampans and fishing-junks, scattered all over the blue like a swarm of flies. Where could all those things have come from? The fishermen, their yellow torsos glowing in the full light, with faces hidden by the black shadow of their extinguisher-hats, work quickly, quickly, with incredible facility,—just like manikins wound up by clock-work. Their red nets, cast without apparent effort, are regularly pulled up minute after minute,—each time equally full of jumping fish, that glimmer in the distance, like dust of mother-of-pearl.

But what troop of huge extraordinary creatures has settled down over there upon the mirror of waters, at the foot of Cape Kien-Cha? Doubtless it must be the flotilla of royal junks, laden with rice for the palace, which was expected from the island of Hainan. Judging from their extraordinary forms, it cannot be anything else,—deep-sea monster with long red wings slightly tinged with yellow,—some having bat's-wings, fantastic patterns of

membranes extended,—other having graceful butterfly wings, with a huge Eye painted in the middle of each one to complete the resemblance. So intense is the Chinese sense of animalism that it is impossible for them to depart from the imitation of living forms in whatever they construct. . . . They come; they have just cast anchor, and gradually close their sail-wings with tiresome slowness. Their ruddy color cuts sharply against all those clear blue lights replete with sun-gleams; distance and mirage gives them a still weirder aspect: they seem tall and ethereal. . . .

Behind us a great junk has left the river, bearing a peaked pavilion striped with red; we can see people on board with long robes and parasols. It is the mandarin who is going on board, faithful to his promise. Good! our mission has at least been successful.

But zones of a much deeper blue begin to outline themselves upon the paling surface of the sea; they seem to run, ramifying as they go;—they lengthen out into oat's tails,—as do also in the sky those thin drawn-out clouds, which announce a rising wind.

The sea breeze is coming up. At first we feel only little intermittent puffs, which move our white awning, and die away, and spring up again. But soon the entire bay is invaded by that deeper tint, extending like an immense oil-stain;—now it is all wrinkled with blue striæ;—the wind blows softly, and we feel a new sense of life.

And in the fishing-junks, all so inert an hour ago, there is now a general agitation;—the nets have been

pulled in;—masting and rigging of the most extravagant and exaggerated description, grow up everywhere as if by enchantment;—long articulated legs,—long horns, long antennæ, and sails of plaited straw open, one after the other, assuming all conceivable forms of wings. In the offing they look like sea-gulls, like beetles, like butterflies;—it is as though some fairy, by one wave of her magic wand, had suddenly hatched out all those slumbering chrysalides. And the astonishing population takes life, rises up, and starts merrily away to the fishing-grounds of the high sea.

The wind keeps freshening. Some of those junks go by bending nearly over under the pressure of their crazy sails;—in order to maintain such equilibrium, the people who direct them perch themselves outside the ship, at the end of long spars, or wooden buttresses, where they sit crouched up like young monkeys. Some pass us by on the right, some on the left; others grazes us with their wings;—some shoot ahead of us, right across our path,—very lightly, with a whispering sound, scarcely leaving thin white trails upon the water.

We also pull in our oars, and put out all the canvass we can bear. We move rapidly enough, and inhale the breeze which reinvigorates us,—feeling somewhat vexed, nevertheless, to find ourselves actually cumbrous, heavy, clumsy, in the midst of all those queer things flying away.

FRAGMENTS FROM MY DIARY

3

FRAGMENTS FROM MY DIARY

Translated from the original manuscript.

"The New Orleans Times-Democrat", December 28, 1884.

I

May, 1883.

. . . . It was a beautiful spring day when that order to embark came like a thunder-stroke, breaking up everything,—fond ties of home, all the hopes and projects for the coming summer.

There was war in Tonkin. It was necessary to start immediately without even so much as looking back;—to leave everything, fatherland, family, love, and the delicious springtime of France;—to leave everything, and hasten to embark at Brest, where the armaments were hurriedly assembling.

* * * * *

Never had I beheld it so sunlit before, that great dismal city of Brest,—a place replete for me with so many memories, with so many inexpressible impressions of all my previous departures and of all my returns;—never had I seen so fair a spring there. It was May; the harbor was blue; there were flowers and a warm sunlight upon shore; there was unusual gayety in the streets, and a great tumult of sailors. . . .

And in this city of Brest, in those last days, even at the eve of departure, a love episode, perilous, unexpected, made of chance and springtime, made feverish the

nights,—those short nights of May, which vanish at 4 o'clock in the morning with the first awakening chatter of the swallows. And I plunged recklessly into that love-adventure, as if the one might enable me momentarily to forget the other,—the true,—from which this exile had separated me.

* * *

And then, the farewell afternoon passed at Toulven, with that dear little godson of mine, in the same little granite house which poor Yves had also been obliged to leave,—having sailed several days before me for that great furnace of Asia. . . . What rare and splendid weather it was that day!—the woods already so green,—May blossoms everywhere in profusion,—early pink fox-gloves here and there, and the first catch-flies opening in all the shady roads. . . . How keenly I felt the charm of Brittany at the moment of bidding it adieu—perhaps for ever! . . . What a strange sinking of the heart I felt when I kissed little Pierre that evening, that evening of spring,—just ere the vehicle started and bore me away! . . .

* * *

At last came the great day of departure, after an exciting week of preparation and of farewells. Under the still unbroken luminosity of May, our corvette moved off—slowly at first, to the sound of music cheering our going. All the marines and sailors stood on the deck; and while France, still visible, commenced to retreat from our gaze, the solemn *roll-call* of departure was made. We counted each other, we examined each others' faces

—newly made comrades by hazard, all launched forth in the same adventurous expedition. . . . And the corvette, moving steadily, left the *Passes de Brest*, and the Breton coasts fled away from us, far into the infinitudes of the immense sea. Then all suddenly, I felt the sinking at my heart again;—it was all over;—I knew that I was bound for far-distant Asia,—and there came to me a presentiment that I should never return. . . .

II

. . . . Then the sea became more blue, the sky more limpid, the sun more warm;—and Algeria appeared, and thrilled me as it had ever done.

I do not know how to describe the charm of that city of Algiers; it is full of memories for me,—memories of a certain spring which was the most radiant of all my adult life;—and then the very country itself, those odors, that Arab life,—all fill one with a delicious intoxication, unlike that produced by any other part of the world.

It was a little unexpected, this halt,—so brief, so fugitive,—on our way to that yellow hell. . . . Delightful lounging under the white arcades, with Si-Mohammed, the old-time friend, whom I found again. The first evening we passed in the very highest portion of the old Arab quarter, resounding with plaintive music of flutes and tambours, and the noisy dances of a band of nomads who had come from the confines of the desert. . . . O those Kasbah nights, with their scents of orange and odors of strange incense, and the great painted eyes of the Mauresque women! . . .

The last morning, Si-Mohammed and Si-Abdellah came on board for me, to take me to breakfast with them at the "pêcherie," on the beach of the Mediterranean. And I never saw such resplendence of light, such a great sun-joy as that morning. On our way back, about midday, as we were crossing the great white Place d'Alger under the extreme heat, Si-Abdellah said to me:—"I have been in your country,—in France; it is very fine and very warm there in summer; but I think you never have so much light there as this." And then both of them began to question me about those far-away lands of Asia to which I was going, and which to them seemed lands of dream.

They accompanied me on board,—my two Arab friends. And at 1 o'clock, our corvette got under way, to traverse the warm blue Mediterranean to Egypt.

III

Port Said.—A great capharnaum of all nations,—with Egypt and infinities of sand for a background.

A little Maronite child who is in a boat there when we arrive, has on his hat a ribbon of the "*Triomphante*",—Yves' vessel. Immediately I question the people who are with the child. "*The Triomphante*?—she left eight days ago——"

I had indulged the hope of meeting him there, poor Yves,—of seeing him, if it were only for a moment, before the war.

Now I must abandon it altogether.

* * * * *

A strange night . . . a Fellah-woman, beautiful as a Goddess. I had seen her passing by during the day, all darkly enveloped in long sombre blue robes. . . . These women have a special deportment, a certain superb nobility of manner, which indicates their possession of a sort of carnal idealism of a very superior sort—something antique, which we of the Occident have wholly lost. . . .

The first part of our journey across the isthmus,—as far as the Bitter Lakes,—was made under a blinding blaze of light. By us fled backward swiftly the glistening sands of the country of Moses,—mirages,—long trains of camels on either bank,—little villages, few and far between, smothered in admirable thickets of bay-rose, though in the very centre of the arid desert. . . .

A night at anchor in the Bitter Lakes, a half-way to Suez. My night on watch, in company with a poor Arab fireman, hired the evening before at Port Said. I had known him when he lived in a sort of quasi-splendor at Stamboul; and it was a queer meeting! To have thus found him again,—to hear him address me in that almost forgotten tongue of Islam,—asking me what had become of the *Hanum* (lady) who was with me at Constantinople,—all this gave me a certain inexpressible pleasure, not unmixed with pain. . . . And what a night was that, in the Bitter Lakes! Blue water, rose-colored mountains and sand, an argentine moon, and clouds very, very small, like chips of mother-of-pearl. And there were locusts; there were crickets—everywhere,—all over the rigging and the masts; they had taken us by storm—a deafening tumult, with sonorities of crystal in it—(nothing like the

noise made by our crickets in France);—they sang furiously until morning as if maddened by joy and warmth.

* * *

The city of Suez appeared before us on the morning of the second day, in an incredible blaze of light. . . . And then we commenced to descend the Red Sea; and the heat augmented, and the blue of the sky became tarnished with sand-clouds; and breathing itself became painful. . . . By night the stars changed; the Southern Cross slowly rose in heaven, and I beheld its rising with the emotion of many old memories. . . .

Of watchnights, the pilot Mohammed, robed in pink, told me stories about his harem at Suez, and his other harem at Aden. We spent the hours of watch almost naked, and when relieved, lay down upon a mat, to slumber under the stars. . . .

During the burning days, a great furnace-breeze, charged with sand and with locusts, urged us from behind;—we remained immobile and helpless with heat, in the shadow of the awnings,—dreaming of the land of France ever growing further and further away from us, and of the Unknown awaiting us in the further East.

I remember that during those torrid hours, the sailors used to chant in a low voice the old Breton song:—

—“*Sur quatrevingt-dix hommes,—lon la!*

Un seul il est resté. . . .

Et Digue don ma Doué ?”

Ever the same song,—never another; it will long recall to me memories of that Red Sea.

* * *

Aden—a stay of a day and a half. Then we entered the Indian Ocean with a squall behind us;—the sea ran very high, and for a whole day my cabin was full of water.

The fair weather returned; the engine-fires were extinguished; and we commenced to navigate gently under sail, with a steady breeze, in the pure lukewarm weather. This is the true art of seamanship that our fathers knew, —the navigation that gives both repose and new life.

. . . . How quickly one gains strength in this life on board ship, under my beloved tropical sky! When I have resumed my white dress and my tanned skin and my fan,—when I find myself again with closely-cropped hair and bare feet,—I seem to become again *another man*—another who existed ere now, and whom I recognize. Then my French past withdraws further back into a sort of weird distance.

Very busy on board, with my topmen. . . . And besides there are the gymnastic exercises to attend to—boxing, etc.,—all those arts which are naturally entrusted always to me. And I practice them with the men;—I feel a new physical life, and almost cease to think of other things.

IV

July 11, 1883.

. . . . Beneath a veranda under the shelter of immense trees. Torrential rain.

This is India! . . .

Above the splendid vault of green there is such a

thickness of clouds that one is imprisoned, so to speak, in a kind of night. The earth is strewn with leaves and with blossoms that have fallen from those trees. The passers-by—they are very few!—have very large eyes, like those of the Hindoo idols, and long hair tied up at the back like those of women. They walk along gravely under the shower, and pull up very high over their yellow legs their *pagnes*, which are ornamented with Cashmerian designs. Not far from me, a serpent-charmer makes a great cobra dance to the sound of a sort of reed-flute;—it holds itself almost perfectly erect, with tongue protruded, and neck curved swan-wise. One can smell very strongly the odor of India—which is musky, very exciting. . . .

Ten o'clock p.m.—The city of Colombo slumbers. I have come back, under the same veranda, to finish by lamp-light some letters for the next French mail. Two beings are squatting beside me, who resemble the Blue God;—crouching down upon their heels, with their hands resting upon their feet, as apes sit,—two young men with eyes like those of an amorous cat, and wearing their hair long like women:—a strange ambiguity of sex. Half-dozing they await the moment when I shall have finished and be ready to depart, in order to close up the place and put out the lights.

It has rained in torrents all day long;—the huge vault of trees above us streams with water; the ground beneath is literally heaped with leaves and flowers. The odor of musk is everywhere,—more persistent and irritating than during the day. Huge clouds, heavy and somber, still hang in the sky;—the night is absolutely black.

A last chant comes from afar, half-drowsily,—from some Buddhist temple. Fireflies flash hither and thither, like sparks of green fire.

* * *

July 12.—Still in the Indies:—we remain until tomorrow morning. . . . Returned on board very late, after an evening of adventures. . . . A rout of Indian bayadères,—plant-odors that intoxicate. . . . Intoxicated even more by those great velvety eyes which all the women of this country have,—even the most abandoned,—intoxicated by the pleasure of the companionship of creatures belonging to this admirable race, perhaps the most beautiful and voluptuous of all human races.—Returned on board very late, bedraggled by all manner of escapades,—having been compelled to fight my way out, like a sailor in a tavern-row; and finally escaping, to run out into the night like a criminal.

v

July 13.—At early morning our vessel makes for the open sea, in very rough weather; there is a vast breeze and a black sky. . . . Later everything calms down; and the blue reappears.

Then comes the great pacification of the sea, all-effacing; we recommence the healthful, restful seafaring life of other days, under full sail, without smoke or steam, after the fashion of the mariners of long ago.

The great island of Ceylon is already far behind us:—it is now only a souvenir—a confused memory. . . .

O those nights of India, so dark and warm,—the

earth all humid after the great rains,—the pale-yellow hibiscus-blossoms strewing all the ways,—even as in the far-off island of *Rarahu*! And the fireflies passing like sparks through the perfume-saturated air. . . . And the black gaze of those Indian eyes. . . .

Now we are crossing the Bay of Bengal,—driven by the monsoon from the S. W. And day after day we have the same marvellously-pure sky, the same soft wind, the same infinite blueness of sea.

* * *

One night, at 1 o'clock in the morning, the helmsman had orders to awake me, although it was not indeed my turn on watch that night. And I went on deck to lean, all alone, over the netting, and gaze into the bluish remoteness of night and sea. . . . It was the same point at which, nineteen years before, my brother had been buried.—The sea was very calm that night, the moon thinly-veiled, the horizon vastly-deep toward the south. But northward, on the other hand, toward the resting-place of the dead, clouds, hugely-sombre, seemed to weigh down the waters.

* * * * *

Some days later, at the sunset hour,—the point of Sumatra, of the Kingdom of Atcheen, appeared before us, splendidly green under the great light of gold;—then we descended the Straits of Malacca. . . . The first junks passed us by, their sails all pleated like the wings of bats. We were nearing the extremities of Asia;—we were entering the mouth of the Yellow Hell.

And at Singapore the vast and odious swarming of Chinese life began to eddy all around us.

VI

Singapore, July 23.

Nine o'clock in the evening. . . . In a café. . . . Dirty-white walls, decorated with chromolithographs representing Queen Victoria and family. Filthy table, stinking with spilt brandy.—An English proxenete turns the crank of a hurdy-gurdy,—whence issues a polka-air that gives one the headache.

Through the widely open front the eye can range along two or three miles of straight street, with an incessant current of vehicles, thousands of lanterns,—a rolling torrent of humanity; recalling a momentary fancy of the Parisian boulevards when most thickly thronged.

—But as one gazes on the scene one becomes astonished to find that it is all one vast, strange, and unclean Chinese swarming. Many are absolutely naked—ugly yellow backs with long pendant queues;—others are attired after the fashion of Chinese grotesques in porcelain,—infecting the air with mingled odors of musk and opium. Half of the vehicles, at least, are drawn by men in harness—footrunners in lieu of horses: those who draw them are Chinese, naked men, with queues fastened up in a knot at the back of the head,—with hats in the form of lamp-shades;—those who ride in the vehicles are likewise Chinese,—with loose-flowing queues, affectedly fanning themselves with fans. The shops are Chinese;—the painted lanterns are Chinese;—Chinese also the

voices, the clamors, the disputes. All this life is yellow, hurried, rapacious, apish, and obscene. — There is a heavy heat,—a smell of yellow sweat, of unclean eatables spread upon the ground, of burning incense and of filth; —and the stench of musk dominating all other odors,—irritating, sickening, unbearable.

* * *

. . . . And yet, only half-an-hour before, and only a few yards away from this crowd, I was in the great silent court of a Hindoo pagoda. It was moonlight;—one of those equatorial moonlight nights that are like vast and rose-colored days. And the pagoda lifted up into that light its multiple domes,—which are made of rows and of pyramids of Gods. A remarkably handsome young Indian priest was my guide; and we went to visit a certain very ancient God,—who had been relegated to the further end of the great court, in a low dim chamber. He was a six-armed God, with a very lofty head-dress, and huge eyes of enamel;—his expression was weird and ferocious; his attitude animated, contorted, distressed. He was there all alone, in company with a tiny lamp which they had lighted under his nose by way of deference. A huge dish lay on the ground before him, filled with white flowers which had been strung into wreaths, and smelled like jasmine-blossoms.

* * *

. . . . And this country has also left me the ineffaceable souvenir of a midnight promenade in the open country—in the midst of verdure. How strangely beautiful that night was! . . .

Trees which mock the forms of our oaks, of our poplars, of our magnolias,—but upon a colossal scale unfamiliar to Western eyes,—and full of blossoms, of vast odorous blossoms.

And the ferns, and the palms. . . . palms assuming all forms, and glittering under the moon like a leaf-work of metal;—first the cocoa-palms with their huge and majestic green leaves;—then the cabbage-palms with their little feathery bouquets curling at the termination of reedy stalks so long, so frail, so fine, that one cannot understand how they can stand upright. And the strangest of all;—the fan-banana trees (*arbres-du-voyageur*) with their great green leaves symmetrically unfolded all upon one general plan,—just like the outspread tail of a turkey-cock,—suggesting fancies of big Chinese screens standing here and there among the woods. And so green is the verdure, that even by night, under this pink moonlight, it still remains admirably green.

Until one o'clock that night, I wandered all alone through those paths, under the vault-work of the trees, and the soft sweet light. What silence, what splendor!—what music of crickets, smells of rich earth, aromatics and flowers!—and everywhere the irritating odor of musk, dominating all others, even in the woods.

Everything in this Malay land is musky, even the *rats*, that cross the paths before me very swiftly, with sudden cries of *kwic! kwic! kwic!* uttered in a little joyous voice like that of a bird,—leaving behind them in the heavy air the musky trail of their odor. . . .

. . . . Rapidly we ascended the Chinese Sea, impelled by the monsoon of the S. W. . . .

Two men overboard, one August morning. One of them,—one of my poor topmen, was drowned under my eyes, having been wounded in his fall and unable to swim by reason of his injuries. Vainly he called for help—the first one of us who will never see France again. . . . He was a sailor only twenty-one years old, who had left in the little hamlet of Binic, Lower Brittany, a mother, a young wife, and a little child two months old.

* * *

. . . . Having in charge the gymnastic exercises on board, and the training of the topmen,—the two duties which pleased me most, finding a new life in this physical activity under the great warm sky,—I was proceeding gaily, almost without a thought of care, toward the Yellow Inferno, when one day the fever came,—a burning and unnatural fever. . . . They said: "It is a simple case of sunstroke;—he had to have his turn like every seaman who goes bareheaded;—it will not be serious." And I was put to bed. . . .

Delirium came, with a sensation like fire playing about my temples,—and the following morning I was at the point of death. . . .

—Dying! . . . I will long remember that moment when I found myself face to face with that weird Visitor who began to embrace me . . . it was so strange a sensation of physical anguish, such a sensation as when a limb is numbed by remaining too long motionless, and

appears as if dead;—that very sensation,—only magnified, oppressing, frightful,—gained my whole body, spreading even to the heart. . . . And all the while, complete mental lucidity, full consciousness of the coming end. I wished to speak, to struggle, but no!—it seemed as if the effort had been made *too late*, my lips remained dead and would not move. And already I was all rigid. The three naval physicians on board stood around me, covering me with cauterizations which I could not feel. There was one, I remember, who pinched me—I suppose very hard,—and asked: “Can you feel that?” No;—I could feel nothing,—and yet I could not even tell them so.

Then they thought that I could not hear any more: and they spoke freely. One said: “We must try to bend his arms.” My arms had become rigid as iron;—they could not bend them. “The death-hiccough has not come yet,” said another, touching my throat:—“watch for its commencement.” . . . And all the past of my life appeared to me in a fantastic light,—as if in the furthest remoteness of an awful distance. The great pain, I remember, was the thought that I should never see my mother again. But again I thought with a sort of strange gladness that all the errors and torments of life were about to pass away forever in one great irrevocable blotting-out, and that the eternal peace was coming. . . .

And then all of a sudden my arms relaxed, my clenched fingers unbent,—and I felt the scorching pain of all those burns, and speech returned to me: it was over, —I was saved!

. . . . And yet I had been so calm in that dream of

nothingness;—I had traversed the moment of the last agony;—I had reached the further and more restful slope of the way from life to death: why have they recalled me, I thought, to passions, to regrets, to all the inextricable complications of the great struggle of life? . . . Why indeed,—seeing that some day I must again recommence to pass through the same frightful moment that I had already traversed. . . .

* * *

—Afterwards I remained four days in a state of extreme weakness, —scarcely able to rise up from the bed without fainting. . . . It was while in this condition that I arrived at Tonkin, in a day of gloomy weather and diluvial rain;—it was early morning;—Sylvestre, watching by me, said: “Captain, we have arrived at Tonkin.” —Our ship was still moving; but through my open starboard port, I could dimly distinguish strange things passing by: gigantic *menhirs*, fantastic and gray, rising out of the sea like the ruins of a cathedral. There were thousands of them, filing by in vast succession;—it was like a world of Druidic stones, forming avenues and circuses and labyrinths;—I thought that I must still have delirium, that I was viewing only imaginary objects in some Dantesque country.

But no!—it was only the Bay of Halong, a region whose aspect is probably unparalleled elsewhere in the whole world. Next day, I was able to go on deck.

* * *

But during that convalescence I suffered from home

sickness like a child;—a nostalgia especially connected with thoughts of my mother, and of a certain spot in the Limoise woods,—the entrance to the woods, under the great oaks. At one time I was actually on the point of being compelled to leave my vessel, to take the place of an officer who had just died upon another corvette;—the idea of being obliged to change, of having to leave my comrades on board, threw me into a slight feverish relapse.

Finally, on the eighth day, I was able to resume active duty;—on the tenth, I could take part in the gymnastics. Life and strength returned so quickly, so fully, that the physician was astonished;—I felt like one rejuvenated, reanimated after a thorough rest.

Then we left the Bay of Halong for Tourane and the mouth of the Hué river. Under the crushing heat the campaign was prosecuted with vigorous rapidity. Thuanan was captured; there were three days of bombardment and battle. . . .

And after all these excitements, the peace of a long stay at Tourane began for us.—A mournful peace, the peace of exile in an almost unknown corner of Annam, for an indefinite time. . . .

* * *

This little province of Tourane has been given us to guard,—such will be our obscure role in the war which is going on. We must become acclimated here—must remain here, perhaps, the whole winter. . . . Alas! how strange and distant a burial-place!

A great bay, surrounded by lofty and gloomy mountains. . . . In the middle, a wooded island, with an old abandoned pagoda—a shady nook, where I often go to sleep upon the moss at the foot of the trees. . . . Further away, among the sands, is the mouth of a slender river; and at its first turn, behind the frail bamboos which look like graminæ, is the village—old, decrepit, changeable by the same since I know not what remote period of Annamese history.

And I know that village so well now;—I have wandered through it so much, visited it so often, rummaged its recesses to study its least details, that it has become for me something tiresomely familiar and commonplace. The first feeling of curious interest has passed away;—and I shall never love this land, nor any daughter of this wretched yellow race: it is for me a veritable land of exile—this Annam—where there are no ties to form, no object to charm.

IN THE MOUNTAIN OF MARBLE

IN THE MOUNTAIN OF MARBLE

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"The New Orleans Times-Democrat", July 5, 1885.

. . . . THEN we enter into the region of subterranean enchantments.

. . . . Verily, it is the mountain itself which is the *pagoda*. A whole nation of idols inhabit these caverns; the entrails of the mountain are haunted; and charms lie dormant within its deep recesses. All the Buddhist incarnations are here;—and others more ancient still, whereof the meaning is no longer known to the bonzes. These gods, life-size, stand erect,—brilliant with gold, their eyes enormous and fierce; or they slumber in a squatting posture, with eyes half-closed and with smiles mysterious as eternity. There are some who are all alone in some dark angle,—unlooked for and astonishing. Others, in multitudinous company, sit in a circle beneath a dais of marble, in the green gloom of the caverns,—sinister of feature and menacing in their altitudes;—they seem to be holding councils. All are coiffed with the same cowl of red silk. Some have it drawn forward very low over their eyes, as though to hide themselves, and only allow their smiles to be seen;—you must lift it in order to look at them.

The gildings, the Chinese colors of their costumes have preserved a sort of fresh and still glittering brilliancy;—and yet they are very ancient; the silk of their

cowls has been eaten by worms. They are mummies, astonishingly preserved.

The sides of their temples and the marble rock itself, unchanged from its primitive form, festooned with stalactites,—fissured by all the sweatings of the mountain.

And below, far down below,—in the very lowermost caverns,—dwell other gods who have no more color of any sort,—whose names are no longer known,—who wear stalactites in their beards, and masks of saltpetre upon their faces. They are old as the world,—those gods;—they lived when our Occident was still the icy virgin forest where dwelt the cave-bear and the gigantic reindeer. And the inscriptions round about them are no longer Chinese;—they were traced by the hand of those first men who existed before any known era. Their bas-reliefs seem even to antedate the shadowy epoch of Ongkor;—antediluvian gods they are, surrounded by things incomprehensible. But the bonzes venerate them still; and their caverns smell of incense.

The vast and solemn mystery of this mountain is that it has been replete with adoration and consecrated to the gods, ever since there appeared upon earth beings who think. . . . Who were they that wrought those idols below? Were they even men like ourselves? Did they dwell more in darkness than we,—those first men,—when the world round about them was still young? Or rather, may it not have been that they saw God nearer than we, with our dim eyes, can see Him? . . . Then, but newly emanated from Him, they knew, perhaps, a special reason for selecting this place in which to adore Him. . . . And

they knew well, perhaps, what they were doing when they gave those multiple arms,—those sensual shapes that seem turgid with all the saps of life,—those faces which confound our understanding,—to Him, the Incomprehensible, who,—ten thousand years before having created our Christian Occident in pale, soft light,—had already brought into being the astounding life-germs of Asia, and made her all that she has been—exuberant, lascivious, monstrous, colossal.

* * * * *

. . . . Lee-Loo smiles.

—“The grand pagoda?—thou hast not yet seen it.”

And this time he leads the way up the ascending path to the left. . . .

Ever the same steps of marble, the same tapestries of pink vines, the same amaryllis flowers, the same drooping palms, the same huge and rare ferns. The path becomes more and more inclosed; and the tapestries of pink flowers become paler, the plants become frailer in the ever increasing coolness.

Perched everywhere upon the high spires of marble which overshadow us, the tawny-haired oranges appear, following us with their eyes,—all curious, all excited,—gesturing with the apish gestures of old men.

Another portico before us, of an unfamiliar architecture, causes us to halt a moment. It bears no resemblance to the first that we saw;—the strangeness of it is totally different. It is very simple, this portico; and yet in its simplicity there is a *never-seen-before* something which

cannot possibly be defined;—it is as it were the quintessence, the supreme expression of all strangeness. One feels that it is the Gate of the Beyond; and that the Beyond itself is the eternal calm of Nirvana. Vague-nesses of scroll-work,—forms that interlace in a sort of mystical embracing, without beginning and without end,—Eternity with neither joy nor pain,—the eternity of the Buddhists,—annihilation only, and peace in the Absolute Nothingness. . . .

. . . . We pass the portico; and the rocky sides of the way, growing nearer and nearer together, close at last above our heads. The orang-outangs very suddenly disappear, all at the same time,—as if they were now perfectly certain whither we are going, and were hurrying thither themselves, by some path known to them only, so as to get there before us. Our footsteps ring on the marble slabs with that sonority peculiar to subterranean places. . . . We advance under a low vault, which enters into the mountain's heart, through black obscurity.

Night;—and then a strange light reaches us, which is not that of day: a green light—green as a green Bengal-fire.

“The pagoda!” exclaims Lee-Loo.

An irregular gateway, fringed with stalactites, yawns before us—opening into the huge sanctuary halfway between roof and floor. It is the very heart of the mountain—a high, deep cavern with walls of green marble. The level space below is flooded with a sort of transparent penumbra that seems like sea water;—and from on high, through an opening by which the great apes are looking

down at us, falls a dazzling and inexplicably-colored light;—it is as though one were entering into an immense emerald, traversed by moon-beams. . . . And the pagodas, the gods, the monsters, who are there in that subterranean haze,—in that mysterious green splendor of apotheosis,—have the blazing colors of supernatural things. . . .

We slowly descend the steps of a stairway guarded by four horrible gods bestriding beasts that are shaped like nightmares. Directly before us rise two little temples,—whose bases are half-lost in shadow,—all decorated with variegations of rose-color and sky-blue, like the enchanted dwellings of the Earth Genti. . . . Within a fissure of the rocks, a colossal divinity coiffed with a mitre of gold, sits and smiles. And high above the temples and the idols,—inclosing all,—stretches the marble vault like a gigantic and ponderous *velum** with a thousand wrinkles of green.

Those gods of the stairway look at us squintingly with their great false and ferocious eyes;—they laugh back to their very ears, with hobgoblin laughter. They seem, in order to let us pass, to press themselves against the walls,—to hold back their animals,—the monsters they ride,—which grimace at us like tigers. . . . And at the summit of the great dome,—at the verge of the opening through which the green beams fall,—all the orang-outangs are seated, with legs and tails hanging down among the wreathings of the lianas; all watching to see if we continue to descend.

* The great awning spread over the open theatres of antiquity to shield the people from the sun.—T.

We descend hesitatingly,—with involuntary slowness,—seized with I know not what religious horror, unfamiliar and unutterable.

As we reach the last of the marble steps, it commences to grow cold, with a subterranean cold;—when we speak we arouse sonorities that distort our voices.

The floor of the cavern,—a very fine sand,—is covered with bat-guano that exhales a queer musky odor, and speckled with ape-tracks shaped like the imprints of little human hands. Here and there are placed old marble vases, or altars for Buddhist sacrifices.

There are also things that look like very long, like very gigantic brown serpents, which seem to let themselves hang down from the roof of the vault to the ground,—or else like enormous cables, which have the gleam of bronze, and appear to have been extended along the whole height of this nave. . . . They are the roots of lianas,—thousands of years old, perhaps,—exceeding all known dimensions.

. . . . And the orang-outangs, growing bolder, now show an inclination to descend by means of these things, so as to examine us more closely,—for they are the familiars of the sanctuary.

Now we see a group of four bonzes in violet robes, who followed behind us, and who appear standing at the summit of the steps, before the same orifice by which we entered. They remain there a moment, at the mouth of the subterranean corridor, in the sea-water-colored penumbra, looking very, very small between the gods and the monsters. And then they descend the steps in order to

come to us, with a rhythmic step,—bathed in the green reflection which deepens more and more as they descend. It seems some ultra-terrestrial spectacle,—a ritual entering of ghosts into the dwellings of the Buddhist heaven.

* * * * *

—“Must drink,—drink again,—*tchoun, tchoun!*” And that Chinese alcohol, which Lee-Loo has declared to be very necessary on the occasion of visiting the Gods, and very favorable to communication with the Spirits, finally puts us to sleep.

After that heat of the day, after the fatigue of the junk, we feel, while now lying upon the sand below, sensations as of numbness in water—as of repose in cold:—all forms become obscure, we can no longer discern anything but an indefinite green transparency. Of the blue and the rose-colored gods there now remains to us the memory only—together with the impression of being still watched by their great fixed eyes. And then,—as we become more and more motionless,—there comes a confused notion of a going-and-coming commenced all noiselessly about us by personages not altogether human;—of silent descents,—of glidings of silhouettes along ropes extended:—the coming of the great apes. . . .

Then sleep,—absolute and without dreams.

OFF THE EAST AFRICAN COAST

OFF THE EAST AFRICAN COAST

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"*The New Orleans Times-Democrat*", March 13, 1887.

DAYLIGHT rises. It is in the Gulf of Aden—a region eternally hot, a region of mirage.

Before us (returning from India under an unalterable blue sky) the horizon now seems shut off as by heavy veils, of a violaceous grey—almost black.

For the eyes of seamen, accustomed to recognize land from afar off, there are certainly lands under all that;—without actually seeing them, their presence can be divined by a something opaque and motionless which those clouds have, something which I cannot explain. There is more than an island there, evidently;—it would make little difference if one had not been informed beforehand; one would suspect the fact anyhow,—that which now tarnishes the sky with such a great gathering of vapors, must be massive, puissant, immense; one can *feel* in those distances the huge contours, the infinite lines, of a continent.

A continent, indeed, and the profoundest, the most immutable of all: Africa.

We approach nearer: then in the foreground there outlines itself and takes light a sort of perpendicular cliff, level and monotonous. It is a cliff of sand, hardened and gullied; in the matinal sun it appears all of a rosy tint, and shines brightly against those backgrounds of intense shadow. Back of it, towards the interior, the obscure

curtain persistently hangs, accentuates itself; clouds and mountains are there, intermingled and confounded together in one depth of gloom. It looks like a sort of disturbed chaos in which all the storms of earth might be brewing. We follow with our eyes the glimmering cliff which forms the first layer of this soil; it extends out of sight always the same, dismal, useless, dead;—and merely to watch it fleeing by gives one consciousness of the enormity of this Continent of Deserts, in which space counts as nothing; one feels the impression of immense Africa, hot and waste.

Here and there are some bushes, which we can distinguish better and better as we approach: shrubs having the form of little round bouquets, of little parasols. The verdure of them is pale, turned slightly to blue as if by an excess of sun that had faded it; and one would fancy them to be transparent, so light and thin their foliage is.

* * *

MIRAGE—THE GHOST OF A VANISHED SEA

. . . . At the extreme horizon, always remains the same curtain of mountains and of clouds hemming in the desolate expanse where we are. Very high, doubtless, those mountains must be, which outline themselves so far away in a superimposition of silhouettes,—more and more confused with the obscurities of the sky, more and more dark the further they lie in those interior zones whither white men never go. And those far-away backgrounds which remain so sombre to-day bring out into stronger relief the golden blaze of the sands,—the blinding brightness of the foregrounds.

As we advance further and further upon "the Plateau of the Gazelles," tiny little Obock, with its red tiles and its three houses, sinks down in the distance behind us, effaces itself, disappears;—the luminous and mournful plain widens in uniformity all around us.

The sea is also out of sight;—nevertheless the soil is still everywhere strewn with branches of coral and spirally-twisted shells (what the naturalists call "pink-lipped tritons"); it looks like a submarine bottom brought up suddenly into the full light of the sun by some enormous heave from beneath. There are, here and there, a few reddish tufts of grass,—a few queer plants of an extremely pale green, that look as if the color had been eaten out of them by the excessive sunlight. And then, at regular distances,—placed as if with the design of laying out an English garden,—are those puny shrubs, umbel-shaped, with close bright foliage, such as we saw before from the sea—a sort of parasols of prickles leaning over to right or to left on their slender stalks: it is a dismal-looking species of mimosa, the eternal mimosa of African solitudes, the same that grows in all the arid regions of the interior—even far upon the other side of the great deserts, among the sands of Senegal; a mimosa that produces nothing, that is good for nothing, that does not even give any shadow.

* * *

What kind of men can be nourished by such a land? Those, evidently,—those slender and tawny beings of feline aspect, and savage glance, who were pointed out to

us a while before in the village of Obock as native Dankalis;—they are personages whose aspect perfectly harmonizes with that of their country;—they live an errant life, scattered over the sands or among the bushes; and the eternal heat seems to have dried and refined their bodies like those of the gazelles.

We come across a few arriving from the interior countries, with some light baggage on their backs. And another group, "Dankali ladies," halt at our coming as before,—with the same false smile opening over beautiful white teeth: these, too, unroll a panther-skin, which they want to sell us.

Far out, here and there, upon the plain, people are encamped,—upon the level of the burning ground. One must go down upon all-fours, like an animal, to enter their huts. They stay there sitting down, keeping with them ass-foals, skin-bags, grigris, sabres and knives of a wicked shape;—immobile and idle they remain there,—having come to the neighborhood of Obock to trade, or perhaps merely to see. Their manner of receiving is sinister and alarming; the interview on both sides is full of astonishments and suspicions.

* * *

It is now eleven o'clock in the morning. With these mirages, these reflections of the sands, everything gleams and quivers;—a blinding brightness rises from the ground.

We see far away two or three heaps of things, very white, sharply relieved against the reddish plain. Is it a little snow fallen there by some miracle, or else lime, or

stones? Why, no, it moves. Then perhaps men in bur-nouses? or animals?—gazelles?—horses?—It looks like anything you wish,—even like white elephants; for one has no longer any distinct perception of proportions or distances; whatever is a little far becomes distorted and changeable in shape.

Merely sheep!—But queer sheep, extremely white, with very black heads and widespread, fan-shaped tails,—like those of Egypt. Rare flocks which are sent out daily to browse upon I don't know what sort of herbs, and which are hastily driven back at sundown toward the village of Obock, before the hour when the beasts of prey begin to prowl.

These are the last living beings we shall meet while continuing to advance further into the immense plain. It will soon be noon. At this hour white men never go out;—it is only our rashness that accounts for this exceptional incident—the rashness of strangers newly arrived, and anxious to see everything. We feel upon our shoulders, and through our white clothes, a scorching sensation, as of being burned. We project no shadows now as we walk—only a little black circle which stops short at our feet;—the sun is just at the height of heaven, in the zenith, and all his fire falls vertically on the earth.

Nothing stirs anywhere; everything is dead with the heat;—one cannot even hear that insect-music which, in other countries of the world, forms the persistent sound of life through summer noons. But all the plain trembles more and more,—trembles, trembles,—with a motion which is incessant, rapid, febrile,—but which is absolutely

silent, like the motion of imaginary objects, of dreams. Over all the distances an indefinable something is spread,—a something which resembles moving water, or a fabric of gauze stirred by the wind,—and which has no real existence, which is nothing but a mirage. The far-off mimosas take strange shapes; they lengthen or broaden out, or double themselves in the middle, as if reflected in that deceptive waters which invades the sands without making any noise, which moves though there is not a breath of air moving. And it all sparkles, dazzles, fatigues;—the imagination is alarmed by the great and melancholy resplendence of this desert.

In the background the sombre mountains still remain under a heaping of heavy clouds. On this side everything ends in a sort of indecisive and shadowy desolation; the view is lost in black profundities beyond:—it is the interior of Africa that lies behind those obscurities and those storms. . .

THE APPARITION

THE APPARITION

From "PECHEURS D'ISLANDE."

"The New Orleans Times-Democrat", May 23, 1886.

. . . . THEY remained this time caught in the thick fog, ten days in succession, without being able to see anything. The fishing continued to be good; and with so much to do, there was no chance to get the blues. From time to time, at regular intervals, one of them blew a great horn, whence issued a sound like the bellowing of a wild beast.

Sometimes from beyond,—from the profundities of white fog,—another and far-distant bellowing responded to their call. Then a sharper watch was kept. If the cry was approaching, all ears were strained in the direction of that unknown neighbor, whom they would doubtless never see, but whose presence was a danger nevertheless. Conjectures were made about her; the strange vessel became a subject of converse, a sort of company for them,—and all, longing to see her, strained their eyes in vain efforts to pierce those impalpable white muslins which remained hanging in air in all directions.

Then the invisible neighbor would depart,—the bellowing of her trumpet would die away in distance;—and they would find themselves alone again in the silence—in the midst of that infinity of immobile vapors. Everything was drenched with water; everything streamed with salt and brine. The cold became more penetrating;—each day the sun took longer to drag himself below the

horizon;—already the real nights were only one or two hours long; and their gray advent was glacial and weird.

Every morning they tried to sound the depth with a plummet-line, through fear that the *Marie* might have approached too near to the Icelandic coast. But all the lines on board, fastened end to end, were paid out in vain; the sea-bottom could not be reached. So they knew they were well out to sea, in clear deep water.

* * * * *

One morning, about three o'clock, while all were dreaming quietly under their winding-sheet of fog, they heard something like a sound of voices—voices whose tones seemed to them strange and unfamiliar. Those who were on deck looked at each other,—questioned each other with their eyes: “Who was talking just now?”—“Nobody,—no!—nobody said anything.” And, indeed, the sounds had seemed to come out of the exterior void. Then the man who had charge of the horn-trumpet, and had neglected his duty since the previous evening, rushed to it, and filling his lungs to their utmost sounded with all his might the long bellow of alarm.

The sound alone was enough to make one shudder in that silence. . . . And then, as if a spectre had been evoked by that vibrant and droning cry, a huge unforeseen thing outlined itself suddenly in grey, and towered all threatening and very tall right beside them:—masts, spars, rigging, like the shape of a ship which had formed in air, all at once,—instantly—just as those phantasmagoria, intended to terrify, are created by a single jet of

light upon a sheet of outspread canvas. And other men appeared there, almost close enough to touch them—leaning over the bulwarks,—staring at them with eyes very widely open, in the awakening of surprise and fear. . . .

They rushed for oars, spare masts, gaffs,—everything long and strong they could lay hands upon,—and stuck them out to hold off that Thing and those approaching visitors. And the other men, also terrified, put out enormous poles to repel them.

But there was only a very slight creaking in the yards above their heads; and the riggings, momentarily entangled, became disengaged again without the least damage;—the shock, very gentle in such a calm, had been wholly deadened: indeed, it was so feeble that it really seemed as if the other ship had no substance—that it was a soft thing, almost without weight.

. . . . Then, when the fright was over, the men began to laugh;—they could recognize each other: "*Ohé*—you *La Marie* boys!" "Hello! Laos, Laumec, Guermeur!" . . . The spectre was the *Reine-Berthe*, Captain Larvoër, also of Paimpol;—those sailors were from neighboring villages;—the great tall fellow there, with the huge black beard, who showed his teeth when he laughed—that was Kerjégou, one of the Ploudanfel boys; and the others were from Plounès or from Plounérin.

—"Why didn't you blow your trumpet, anyhow?—you troop of savages!" asked Larvoër, the Captain of the *Reine-Berthe*.

—"Yes,—and why didn't you!"—you lot of pirates and sea-robbers,—you old mess of sea-poison?" . . .

—“Oh! with us, you know, . . . it's different;—*we're forbidden to make any noise.*” (He made this reply with an air of giving a dark hint,—with a queer smile also, a smile that long afterward came back to the memory of the men of the *Marie*, and gave them a great deal to think about.) And then, as if he thought he had already said too much, he concluded with a joke: “That trumpet of ours, you know?—this fellow here burst it, blowing into it.” And he pointed to a sailor with a face like a Triton—a man all neck and chest, extravagantly broad-shouldered, low-set upon his legs,—with something unspeakably grotesque and unpleasant in the deformity of his strength.

And while they were looking at each other there,—waiting for some breeze or some under-current to move one vessel faster than the other, to separate them, a general chat began. All, leaning over the bulwarks,—holding each other off at a respectful distance with their long wooden defenses, like besieged men repelling an assault with pikes—began to talk about home-affairs, about the last letters received by the *chasseurs*, about relations and wives.

—“Me!—my old woman,” said Kerjégou, “tells me she's had the little boy we were looking for;—that makes twelve now!”

Another had found himself the father of twins; and a third announced the marriage of pretty Jennie Caroff,—a girl well-known to all the Icelanders,—with some rich and infirm old resident of the Commune of Plourivan.

They saw each other as if through white gauze; and

this also seemed to cause a change in the sound of voices,—which came as if muffled and far-away.

Meanwhile Yann could not take his eyes off one of those fishermen,—a little man, already grizzled, whom he was sure he had never seen before, and who had nevertheless immediately said to him: “Good day, my big Yann,” with all the familiarity of long acquaintance;—he had the provoking ugliness of an ape, and apish twinkling of mischief in his piercing eye.

—“Me!” again said Larvoer of the *Reine-Berthe*—“I’ve been told of the death of the grandson of old Yvonne Moan, of Ploubazlanec,—who was serving his time in the navy, you know, in the Chinese squadron:—a very great pity!”

On hearing this the men of the Marie all turned toward Yann to learn if he already knew anything of the mishap.

“Yes,” he answered, in a low voice, with an indifferent and haughty air,—“it was in the last letter my father sent me!” . . . They all kept looking at him, curious to find out the secret of his grief; and it made him angry.

Their questions and answers were hastily exchanged through the pallid mists; while the moments of their queer interview slipped swiftly by.

—“My wife wrote me at the same time,” continued Larvoër,—“that Monsieur Mevel’s daughter left the town to live at Ploubazlanec and take care of her grandaunt—old Moan. She goes out to work by the day now,—to make her living as a servant. Anyhow I always thought,

I did, that she was a good brave girl, in spite of her fine-lady airs and her furbelows." . . .

Then, again, every one stared at Yann, which made him still more angry; and a red flush mounted to his cheeks under their gold-colored tan.

With Larvoër's expression of opinion about Gaud, ended this interview with the crew of the *Reine-Berthe*—none of whom were ever again to be seen by human eyes. For a moment their faces seemed to become dimmer,—for their vessel was already further away; and then, all at once, the men of the *Marie* found they had nothing to push against,—nothing at the end of their long wooden poles: all their spars, oars, yards, spare masts, were groping and quivering in emptiness;—then they fell heavily, one after the other, on the sea, like great dead arms. So they pulled all the useless defenses on board: the *Reine-Berthe*, gliding away into the thick fog had disappeared as suddenly as a painted figure on a lampshade, when the lamp is suddenly blown out. They tried to hail her; but the only response was a sort of mocking clamor, as of many voices,—ending in a moan that made them all stare at each other in surprise. . . .

That *Reine-Berthe* never came back with the other Icelandic vessels; and as the men of the *Samuel-Azénide* afterward picked up in some fjord an unmistakable waif—(part of her taffrail with a bit of her keel)—all ceased to hope for her: in the month of October the names of all her crew were inscribed upon black slabs in the church.

Now, from the time of that apparition,—the date of

which was well remembered by the men of the *Marie*,—until the time of their return, there had been no really dangerous weather on the Icelandic seas; while, on the other hand, a great storm from the West had, three weeks before, swept several sailors overboard, and swallowed up two ships. Then folks remembered Larvoër's queer smile; and, putting this and that together, many strange conjectures were made. Yann, more than once in the night, dreamed that he again saw the sailor who winked like an ape; and more than one of the men of the *Marie* asked themselves whether they had not, that morning, been talking with ghosts.

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IN TONQUIN

IN TONQUIN

From "PECHREURS D'ISLANDE."

"*The New Orleans Times-Democrat*", May 23, 1886.

. . . . THE whistling of a ball through the air! . . .
Sylvestre stops short, listening. . . .

It is upon an infinite plain, green with the tender and velvety green of spring. The sky is gray,—heavy as if weighing upon the shoulders.

There are six armed sailors there, reconnoitering among the chill rice-fields, on a mud path. . . .

. . . . Again! . . . the same noise breaking the silence of the air! A shrill and snoring sound, a sort of prolonged *dzinn*, giving well the idea of that little hard wicked thing passing straight by, very quickly,—an encounter with which might prove mortal.

For the first time in his life, Sylvestre hears that music. The balls coming toward you have a different sound from those you fire yourself: the far-off report is attenuated, you do not hear it;—then it is easier to distinguish that little humming of the metal, shooting by in its swift course,—grazing your ears. . . .

. . . . And *dzinn* again, and *dzinn*! . . . They are raining now, the balls. Quite close to the marines, stopped suddenly, they bury themselves in the flooded soil of the rice-field—each with a little sound of *flac*, like falling hail,—dry and quick,—and a slight splash in the water.

They looked at each other, the marines,—smiling as if at a farce oddly performed, and they exclaimed:—

"The Chinese!" (For in the opinion of sailors, Annamites, Tonquinese, or Black Flags, all belong to the same Chinese family.) And how express all the disdain, the old mocking rancor, the spirit of fight that they threw into that simple manner of announcing their presence: "The Chinese!"

Two or three balls again whistle,—more grazing, these;—they can be seen ricochetting, like crickets in the grass. It has not lasted a minute, that little sprinkling of lead; and already it has ceased. Upon the great green plain the absolute silence falls again; and nowhere can anything be seen to move.

The whole six are still standing there, with eyes on the watch,—all scenting the breeze;—they try to discover whence the volley came.

—Must be from over there,—from that clump of bamboos, which looks like an islet of feathers in the plain, and behind which can be perceived, half concealed, some cornute roofs. Then they all run toward it;—in the soaked soil of the rice-field, their feet sink or slip;—Sylvestre, with his longer and more agile legs, is the one who runs ahead.

No more whistling sounds;—one would think they had been dreaming. . . .

And as in all countries of the world, certain things are forever and eternally the same,—the gray of over-shadowed skies, the fresh tint of meadows in spring,—one could imagine one were looking at French fields, with young men running merrily over them, playing a very different sport from the game of death.

But as they get nearer, those bamboos display more clearly the exotic delicacy of their foliage;—those village roofs accentuate the singularity of their curves. And yellow men, in ambush there, thrust out their flat faces, contracted by malice and fear, to look. . . . Then, suddenly, they all come out, with a cry, and deploy into one long line,—quivering, but resolute and dangerous.

“The Chinese!” again exclaim the sailors, with their same brave smile. But this time, at all events, they find that there are a great many,—that there are too many! And one of the marines, turning to look, sees others coming upon them from behind—emerging from the high grass and weeds. . . .

* * * * *

He was splendid at that instant, on that day,—was little Sylvestre; his old grandmother would have been proud to find him such a fighter.

Already transfigured as he had been for several days,—all bronzed and his voice changed,—he seemed to be in his own element there. At a certain moment of supreme indecision, the sailors, feeling the bullets grazing them, had almost yielded to that impulse of retreat which must have proved death to all of them; but Sylvestre had continued to advance:—seizing his rifle by the barrel, he held his own against a whole band, striking down with great sweeping blows of the butt to right and left. And, thanks to him alone, the situation had been reversed;—that panic, that wildness, that indescribable something which blindly decides all things in such little undirected

battles, had passed over to the Chinese side;—it was they who were beginning to retreat. . . .

. . . . Now it was all over;—they were flying. And the six sailors, having reloaded their repeating rifles, shot them down leisurely: there were red pools in the grass,—bodies overthrown,—skulls emptying their brain into the water of the rice-field.

They all ran stooping down, almost touching the ground, crouching like leopards. And Sylvestre kept running after them, although twice wounded already,—once by a lance-thrust in the thigh, again by a great slash across his arm;—yet feeling nothing but the intoxication of battle, that unreasoning intoxication which comes of vigorous blood,—the same which gives superb courage to simple souls, and which made the heroes of antiquity.

One, whom he was pursuing, turned to take deliberate aim at him, in the inspiration of desperate terror. Sylvestre halted smiling, contemptuous, sublime, in order to let him fire;—then sprang a little to the left, seeing the direction the shot was about to take. But with the pressure upon the trigger, the barrel of the Chinese rifle deviated also in the same direction. Then, he, felt a commotion in his chest, and in one lightning flash of thought well understanding what it was,—even before he felt any pain,—he turned his head toward the other marines who were following him, and tried to say to them, like an old veteran, the traditional phrase,—“I think it’s all up with me!” In the great aspiration that he took with open mouth, after so much running, in order

to fill his lungs with air, he felt that air rushing in also through a hole in his right breast, with a horrible little noise, like that of a broken whistle. At the same time his mouth filled with blood; and there came a pain in his side, a keen pain which aggravated quickly, quickly, till it became something atrocious and unspeakable.

He turned upon his feet two or three times, senseless with dizziness,—trying to catch his breath through the red fluid whose rising suffocated him, —— and then, heavily, in the mud, he fell. . . .

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THE DEATH OF SYLVESTRE

THE DEATH OF SYLVESTRE

From "PECHEURS D'ISLANDE."

"The New Orleans Times-Democrat", May 30, 1886.

ABOUT fifteen days later, as the sky was already darkening with the approach of the rainy season, and the heat was beginning to weigh more heavily upon that yellow Tonquin, Sylvestre, who had been carried back to Hanoï, was sent to the port of Ha-Long, and put aboard an hospital-ship which was about to leave for France.

He had been carried from place to place for a long time upon different litters, with intervals of rest in ambulances. All that could have been done had been done; but under these unfavorable circumstances, his chest had filled with water, upon the pierced side; and the air still entered, with a gurgling sound, through the little hole that would not close.

He had been given the military medal; and this had caused him a momentary joy.

But he was no longer the gallant fellow he had been before,—resolute of gait, vibrant and pithy of speech. No; all that had passed away from him under the influence of long suffering and enervating fever. He had become a child again, with the homesickness of a child;—he scarcely talked at all; only answering questions sometimes in a feeble and almost inaudible voice. To feel oneself so sick, and to be so far, so far away!—to think it would take so many days and so many nights to reach home!—could he even live to get there, with his strength con-

tinually decreasing as it was? . . . This idea of frightful distance was a thing which continually haunted him,—which weighed upon him at each awakening, when, after long hours of stupor, he was aroused again to the awful sensation of his wounds, the heat of his fever, and the little whistling sound in his perforated chest. So he had begged them to put him on board, in spite of all risks.

He was very heavy to carry to his ward;—consequently, without intending it, they gave him some cruel jolts in taking him there.

He was laid upon one of the little iron beds,—placed in rows, hospital fashion,—on board the departing transport;—and he recommenced, in a contrary direction, his long voyage across the sea. Only this time, instead of living like a bird in the free wind of the mast-tops, he had to remain in the heavy air below decks, amidst exhalations of medicaments, of wounds and of misery.

During the first few days, the joy of being homeward bound, caused him to feel a little better. He could suffer himself to be raised in bed, and supported with pillows; and he asked sometimes for his box. The only seaman's chest he had was the white wooden box he had bought at Paimpol to keep all his precious things in;—there were the letters from grandmother Yvonne, and those from Yann and from Gaud; a copy-book into which he had copied the songs sung by the sailors on board; and one of the works of Confucius in Chinese, caught up at random during a pillage,—upon the blank side of whose leaves he had kept the artless diary of his campaign.

Nevertheless there came no amelioration in his con-

dition; and after the first week, the physicians considered that death was inevitable.

* * * * *

Near the Equator now, in the excessive heat of storms. The transport-ship kept on her course, shaking all her beds, her sick, and her wounded;—always rushing swiftly over a billowy sea still troubled as in the great shifting of the monsoons.

Since leaving Ha-Long, there had died more than one whom they were obliged to throw into the deep water of that great French route;—many of those little beds had been already disburthened of their poor contents. And on this day in particular, it was very dark in the moving hospital;—on account of the high seas it had been necessary to close the iron port-lids, and the stifling heat of the sick-room was thus rendered more horrible still.

As for him he was much worse: it was the end. Lying always on his wounded side, he kept both his hands pressed upon the pierced place with all the strength he had left,—trying to immobilize that water, that liquid decomposition in the right lung, and endeavoring to breathe with the other only. But the other also had become affected by proximity; and the last agony had commenced.

All sorts of visions of home haunted his dying brain;—in the hot obscurity, faces beloved or forms of fear came to bend over him; he was dreaming a perpetual dream of hallucination, through which floated apparitions of Brittany and of Iceland.

. . . . He asked for air, for air; but there was none anywhere; the ventilators no longer gave any; the infirmarian, who kept fanning him all the time with a flower-painted Chinese fan, merely moved unhealthy vapors over him,—stalenesses already breathed a hundred times, which the lungs of all revolted against.

Sometimes fits of wild raging came upon him—raging to leave that bed in which he could feel the approach of death so well, to climb up aloft into the free air, to try to live again. . . . Oh! those others, who were running in the rigging, who lived in the mast-tops! . . . But all his supreme effort to rise ended only in a lifting of his head and feeble neck,—something like those incomplete movements one makes during sleep.

. . . . Ah, no! he could do nothing more;—he sank back into the same hollows of his tossed bed,—riveted to the one place, already glued there by death;—and after the fatigue of such a shock, each time he lost all consciousness for an instant.

In order to please him, they opened a port at last; although it was still dangerous, for the sea was not yet calm enough. It was about six o'clock in the evening. When the iron shutter was lifted, nothing but light came in—a dazzling red light. The sinking sun appeared in the horizon with extreme splendor, through the rift of a sombre sky;—its blinding radiance floated over the swell; and it lighted up the hospital vacillatingly, like a waving torch.

Air, no, there came none; the little there might have been without was powerless to enter—to chase away the

odors of fever. Everywhere, to the verge of the infinite, all over that equatorial sea, only a humid heat, an irrespirable heaviness, prevailed. No air anywhere, not even for the panting and dying men.

. . . . A last vision greatly excited him:—his old grandmother, hastening along a road, very quickly, with a look of fearful anxiety;—the rain was falling upon her; there were low hanging, funeral clouds;—she was going to Paimpol, summoned thither by the Marine Office, to be informed that he was dead.

He struggled then;—with the death-rattle in his throat. From the corners of his mouth they sponged away the water and blood that had come up from his chest in torrents, during the convulsions of his agony. And still the magnificent sun shone upon him:—in the west, it looked like the conflagration of a whole world, with clouds full of blood;—through the open port-hole entered a broad band of red fire, which came to die upon the bed of Sylvestre,—making a nimbus about him.

. . . . At that same moment the same sun could also be seen in far-away Brittany, where noon had just sounded. It was indeed the same sun, seen at the same instant of its eternal existence;—over there, nevertheless, it had a different color; hanging much higher in a bluish sky;—it shone with a soft white light upon grandmother Yvonne, busy sewing, as she sat at her door.

In Iceland, also, where it was morning, the same sun appeared at the same instant of death. Still more pallid, one would have said that it was only seen there by some marvelous effect of refraction. It beamed wanly over a

fjord down which the *Marie* was drifting; and there its sky had that hyperborean purity which suggests fancies of planets that have grown cold and lost their atmosphere. With icy sharpness it accentuated all the details of that chaos of stone which is Iceland;—the whole land, seen from the *Marie*, appeared as if visible in one perspective, and rising up. Yann, who was there,—himself also weirdly illuminated,—was fishing as usual, in the midst of that lunar scenery. . . .

At the moment when the trail of red fire, which entered the ship's port-hole, died out—when the equatorial sun had totally disappeared beneath the glided waters,—the eyes of the dying grandson were seen to turn up,—to roll back toward the forehead as if about to disappear in his head. Then the long-lashed eyelids were drawn down over them;—and Sylvestre once more became calm and very handsome,—like a reclining marble. . . .

* * *

. . . . Neither can I refrain from telling you about that burial of Sylvestre, which I myself superintended, in the island of Singapore. Enough of other dead had been thrown into the sea during the first few days of our journey;—that Malay land was so close to us that we resolved to keep him a few hours longer in order to enter him there.

It was in the morning,—and very early, on account of the terrible sun. Lying in the boat which bore him to shore, his body was covered with the French flag. The great strange city was still asleep as we landed. A little

wagon, sent by the consul, was waiting for us at the quay: we put Sylvestre in it,—also the little wooden cross the men had made for him on board;—the paint on it was still fresh, for it had to be finished in a hurry; and the white letters of his name were dribbling over the black background.

We passed through that Babel under the rising sun. And then it was such an emotion to find, only a few steps away from the foul swarming of Chinese, the calm of a French church! Under the high white nave, where I stood alone with my sailors, the intonation of the *Dies Irae* by a missionary priest resounded like a sweet and magical incantation. Through the open doors one saw things which looked like enchanted gardens,—admirable verdure, immense palms;—a wind swayed the great flowering trees, and there fell a shower of carmine-red petals that drifted even into the church itself.

After, we went to the cemetery, very far away. Our little sailors' procession was very modest, indeed;—the French flag still covered the coffin. We had to pass through Chinese quarters, through a swarming of yellow people;—then through Malay quarters, and Indian quarters, where all sorts of Asiatic faces were turned to stare at us with astonished eyes.

Then came the open country, already hot; and long shadowy roads over which flitted admirable butterflies with blue-velvet wings. A huge luxury of flowers, of palms: all the splendors of equatorial sap. At last the cemetery: mandarin tombs with multicolored inscriptions, with dragons and monsters;—astounding foliage, unknown

plants! The place where we laid him looked like some nook in one of the gardens of Indra.

Over his resting-place we planted the little wooden cross that had been hurriedly made for him the night before, with the inscription,—“*Sylvestre Moan: aged 19.*” And we left him there,—hastening to get back because of the sun which was ever rising higher, but often turning back to look toward him, under those marvelous trees, under those huge flowers.

* * *

The transport continued on her route across the Indian Ocean. Below, in the floating hospital, there still lingered much imprisoned misery. On deck, all was jollity, health, and youth. Abroad, over the sea, was a one vast festival of sunlight and pure air.

During those fair trade-wind days, the sailors, lying under the shade of the sails, amused themselves with their parrots,—making them run. (For in that city of Singapore they had just left, all sorts of tamed creatures are sold to passing seamen.)

They had all chosen baby-parrots, with a sort of funny little infantile look on their bird-faces;—no tail yet, but already green, oh! admirably green! The papas and the mammas had been green, so these tiny little things had unconsciously inherited that color—placed upon the scrupulously-clean planks of the deck, they looked like very fresh leaves that had fallen from some tropical tree.

Sometimes the men would put them all together:

then the little creatures would observe each other, in a funny way; they would twist their necks in every direction as if to examine each other under all possible aspects. They would walk like lame women, with little comical hobbling—starting off all at once, very quickly, as if in a hurry to get to some unknown fatherland; and some of them would fall down.

And then the apes were taught how to perform tricks,—which was another amusement. There were some apes which were fondled tenderly, and embraced with transport, and which would cuddle up close to the rugged breasts of their masters, and look at them with womanish eyes,—half-tender, half-grotesque.

At the stroke of three o'clock, the quartermasters brought on deck two canvas bags, sealed with big red seals, and marked with the name of Sylvestre; for, according to the regulation in regard to cases of death, all his clothes and everything he owned in the world, were to be sold at auction. And the sailors assembled around the crier, with interest;—on board an hospital-ship one sees too many of these bag-sales to feel any particular emotion. And besides, Sylvestre had been so little known on that vessel!

His jacket, his shirts, his blue-striped undershirts, were all fingered, turned inside out, and finally knocked down to somebody or other at some trifling price,—the buyers forcing the bidding just to amuse themselves.

Then came the turn of the dear little box, which was knocked down to some one for fifty cents. Then letters and the military medal had been taken out of it in order

to be sent to the family; but there remained the copy-book of songs, the volume of Confucius, and the thread, the buttons, the needles—all those little things for mending and patching which had been packed away there through the foresight of Grandmother Yvonne.

Then the quartermaster, who was exhibiting these things for sale, held up two little Buddhas, taken out of some pagoda or other, as a gift for Gaud, and so funnily shaped that a wild burst of laughter went up when they were offered as the last lot. If the sailors laughed it was not that they were heartless,—only because they were thoughtless.

To finish up with, the bags also were sold; and the buyer immediately proceeded to efface the name upon them in order to substitute his own.

Then the deck was swept, to remove from its rigorously clean surface any dust or any particles of thread that might have fallen from the unpacked articles.

And the sailors went back merrily to amuse themselves with their parrots and their apes. . . .

THE BIG BELL

THE BIG BELL

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Nouvelle Revue, March 1, 1887.

"*The New Orleans Times-Democrat*", April 3, 1887.

. . . . THE temple of *Dai-Boutsou* (the Great Buddha) seems a temple built for fun,—an enormous joke to amuse the faithful.

This "Great Buddha" has only a head and shoulders, at least ninety-five feet high;—he seems to be rising from the depths of the earth, with his neck stretching up like some one making a painful effort to struggle out of the ground. He alone fills all his temple; and his curling hair touches its roof.

One reaches him, just as all the gods are reached, by a series of stairways, porticoes, and courts. From the gate of the sanctuary, one cannot very well explain to oneself at the first glance what is that hillock of gold, that shapeless mass in front (the shoulders of Buddha). It is only afterward, when you look up very high, that you see far above you the colossal gilded face, the huge fixed eyes, gazing down upon you from the height of ninety feet with idiotic placidity.

I find myself making this pilgrimage at the same time as a good-natured Nippon family of country people, who have come to the holy city for the first time; and the good folks, especially the ladies, cannot get over the idea of seeing so big a God;—and there are cries of "Ah!" and "Oh!"—exclamations of surprise,—little screams and little laughs. No, really! this Buddha is just too

funny, with his stork-neck, and his stupid air—funny as any of those snow-men which urchins make at the corners of the streets,—funny as some enormous caricature made to order by little children. And there the little country family are all laughing, right under the God's nose,—laughing till the tears roll down their cheeks; and the other visitors, and even the guardian bonzes themselves, also laugh to see them laugh. Then they all look at me, to see how I feel about it;—and I have to laugh too,—can't possibly help it. What a country this Japan,—where everything is oddity, and contrast! Who could ever imagine that this frivolous little temple, with its reverences and its eternal laugh, could have lived through centuries locked up in such ferocious mystery, and have given birth to those thousands of other temples, with their monsters and their hobgoblins?

By the payment of two cents one is privileged to make the round of the Great Buddha;—one ascends by a series of sloping plank-galleries, placed at a very steep angle, on which you can pass behind the head of the colossus, a little above the nape of his neck. I advance upon it,—still accompanied by the voyaging family; the sloping way is slippery, old broken through here and there, worm-eaten;—the ladies very nearly fall; I put out my hand to help them, and then we become good friends right away. Behind the enormous head, in a dark nook, an old bonze is squatting down;—for one cent he shows us a suit of armor, and a war-mask which once belonged to the great Taiko-Sama;—and then he throws open for our benefit sundry very ancient idol-closets in which

animal-headed divinities are conserved, and various relics of weird aspect. There, we do not laugh any more.

In the court of this temple is the most monstrous of all the bells of Kioto—at least seven or perhaps eight yards around. It is rung by means of an enormous beam tipped with iron—a sort of battering-ram suspended horizontally with ropes.

For two cents extra, one has the right to experiment with it;—I harness myself to the pulling-straps; a circle is formed around me; and children run up. Even two or three young girls come behind me to take hold,—bothering me a great deal, pulling the wrong way half the time, bursting into fits of laughter;—the united strength of the three is almost equal to the power of three good kittens.

Meanwhile the battering-ram begins to yield;—gradually it begins to swing. BOOM-BOOM! . . . A sound awful, cavernous, and prolonged into mighty orchestral vibrations, which must be heard through the whole of the sacred city.

Then the audience is so happy!—delirious with joy;—can't get enough of it; every one laughs, every one is in ecstasy. . . .

* * *

A NIGHTMARE IN DAYLIGHT

In Kioto the Holy City, the astonishment of astonishments for me is the *Temple of the Thirty-three Cubits*, also called the *Temple of a Thousand Gods*, conceived eight centuries ago by I know not what mystic in delirium, who must have had prodigious means of execution at his disposal. This temple resembles no other;—neither

altars, nor perfume-burners, nor sacred inclosures;—ten stages of terraces, each two or three hundred feet long—something like an enormous series of circus-seats, upon which a legion of Gods,—from all imaginable sanctuaries, from every empyrean,—should have come to take their places to watch some apocalyptic performance, some crumbling-down of worlds.

In the midst, in the place of honor,—upon the open flower of a golden lotos, vast as the base of a tower,—sits throned a colossal Buddha of gold,—before a golden nimbus deployed behind him like the outspread tail of a monstrous peacock. He is surrounded, guarded, by a score of nightmare-shapes,—something in likeness of human form, exaggeratedly huge,—and seeming to resemble at once both demons and corpses. When one enters through the central door, which is low and sly-looking, one recoils at the sight of these shapes of an evil dream, almost close to one. They occupy all the lower ranges:—they descend, threateningly, even below them.

They wave their arms on high; they make gestures of fury with hands clenched; they gnash their teeth,—open mouths without lips,—roll great eyes without eyelids,—with an expression intense and horrible. Their veins and their nerves, laid bare, run winding over their limbs which have all been designed with startling anatomical exactitude. They have been painted in bloody red, in cadaveric blue, in greenish tints,—like living bodies flayed, or like corpses, with all the hues of quick flesh or of rotteness. About the year 1000 of our era, while we were yet at that artistic stage represented by the naive

saints of the Roman churches, Japan already had artists capable of conceiving and executing these learned refinements of hideousness.

On either side of the great central seat, extend the ranged places of the Thousand Gods—five hundred on the right, five hundred on the left,—standing in line,—in ten lines, rank above rank; and occupying all the space of an army corps. They are all alike,—in one interminable symmetry; of superhuman stature, gold-sparkling from head to feet,—and each with forty arms! From all the lofty head dresses, ringed about with aureoles, flash the same rays of gold; the same robes of gold are close bound about every waist, with Egyptian rigidity. Each of them softly smiles the same mysterious smile,—and holds six or eight of his hands joined in the calm attitude of prayer;—while his other pairs of arms, outspread like the ribs of a fan, brandish in air lances, arrows, skulls, symbols of unknown signification.

In the penumbra of their dwelling-place, they smile, the Gods,—all gazing forever in the same direction,—into the uttermost part of regions which have no existence;—always waiting, with the patience of eternal beings, for that prodigious spectacle they have doubtless assembled to see. Their immobile cold-shining host ranges far back into the interior distances of the temple,—all bristling with lance-heads, and rays of glory, and haloes of gold. . . .

And finally it becomes a fatigue,—an obsession, to think that all this waiting, and all those smiles, and the flaming of that gilded magnificence, and the frenzied

gesticulations of the Others,—the shapes of horror in the midst,—that all this has lasted through hours, through days, through seasons, through years and centuries,—ever since the year one thousand!

Behind the temple a long inclosure has been devoted, from time immemorial, to archery. Even to-day some men are there—bare-armed,—exercising themselves in this noble art of the ancient lords. They shoot their arrows at targets set very far away—white screens: it is a scene of the Past.

Then Kalakawa points out to me the massive wood-work of the temple, all pierced with the stumps of broken arrows;—the huge beams projecting from beneath the roof had served as targets for the lords of other days;—some have been so completely riddled by these whitish stumps, accumulated there through centuries, that it is almost impossible to believe it even while looking;—you think you see porcupines in the air, sticking themselves out from below the timber-work, after the manner of gargoyles.

IN THE PALACE OF TAIKO-SAMA

IN THE PALACE OF TAIKO-SAMA

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Nouvelle Revue, March 1, 1887.

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. . . . ON the other side of the stream [that divides the city in two] is a swarming of the poor and a frightful nastiness. It is the market of the clothing-dealers;—trash, rags. On both sides of the street there lie heaped on the pavement the most incredible tatters,—torn, bed-ragged, sordid, some of them once sumptuous things and still showy: old mattresses, old quilts, old shoes, with a separate place for the great toe;—fine ladies-belts of multicolored satin; beautiful robes of silk embroidered with storks, butterflies, and flowers;—one old hat, of high European form, which must have passed through quite a long romance of adventures, is even there for sale,—flung down upon all that mass of Japanese ruin. Perhaps one might find something worth having in the heap; but it would be a repulsive task to look through it. Let us pass on quickly: all this smells of the yellow race, of mold, and of death.

Then come the dealers in old-iron;—a pell-mell of queer utensils among which are lying in the dust, even old pagoda-lamps and idol-necklaces. . . .

* * * * *

The streets widen; the quarters change aspect. Now we are journeying along broad avenues planted with trees, and passing public squares. And lo! the palace of

Taiko-Sama appears,—lifting above the verdure its lofty roofs,—sombre and superb!

An inclosure of great walls. My *djinn-riksha* halts before an outer portico of ancient style, severe and religious of aspect;—massive columns on bases of bronze; a straight frieze, sculptured with strange ornamentation;—heavy and enormous roofing.

Then I enter, on foot, vast desolate courts, planted with secular trees, whose branches have been stayed up with props, even as the limbs of old men are supported with crutch-sticks. The immense palace-buildings at first appear to me in a sort of disorder—revealing no general plan. Everywhere those lofty roofs, monumental, crushing, whose angles turn up in Chinese curves and bristle with black ornaments.

Seeing no one I walked on at random.

Here absolutely ceases that smile, inseparable from modern Japan. I have the impression of penetrating suddenly into the silence of an incomprehensible past,—into the dead splendor of a civilization whose architecture, design, esthetic sense are to me utterly foreign, and unfamiliar.

A guardian bonze, catching sight of me, approaches and bows; then asks for my name and my passport.

It is all right: he will himself show me all through the palace provided I will be good enough to take off my shoes and remove my hat. He even brings me, for politeness sake, a pair of velvet sandals, which are too large for me. Thanks, I prefer to walk barefoot as he does; and we commence our silent walk through an

interminable series of halls all lacquered with gold,—decorated with a rare and exquisite oddity.

Under our feet, always and everywhere, that eternal layer of white mats which you will find as plain, as pure, as clean wherever you go,—in the palaces of emperors, in the temples, in the houses of citizens, in the dwellings of the poor. No furniture anywhere: it is something unknown, or almost unknown, in Japan: the palace is entirely empty. All its surprising magnificence is on the walls and the ceiling. The precious lacquer of gold spreads itself uniformly everywhere; and upon it, as upon a Byzantine background, all the celebrated artists of the great Japanese era have painted inimitable things. Each hall has been decorated by a different painter, and an illustrious one, whose name the bonze repeats for me with deep respect. In one, the design represents all known flowers;—in another, all the birds of heaven, all the animals of the earth;—or again you see hunting scenes and combats, in which warriors wearing terrific masks and covered with armor, are pursuing on horseback after monsters and chimeras. The queerest hall of all is certainly that in which the decoration consists wholly of fans; fans of all shapes, of all colors,—open, or closed, or half-open,—thrown with exceeding grace all over the fine lacquer of gold. The ceiling, equally gold-lacquered, is arranged in caissons, painted with the same care, the same art. What is most marvellous of all, perhaps, is the series of lofty open-work friezes which reach all around the ceilings;—one dreams of those patient generations of workmen who must have worn out their lives in carving,

out of such thickness of wood, those delicate, almost transparent things; sometimes rose-bushes, sometimes interlacings of glycins, or sheaves of rice;—elsewhere, again, long flights of storks that seem to be cleaving the air at full speed, forming with their thousands of legs, outstretched necks, and feathers, such a finely-combined entanglement of shapes that the whole thing lives, rushes,—that nothing drags or looks vague.

In this palace, which has no windows, it is sombre—a half-darkness well-suited for enchantments. Most of these halls receive a sort of dim light from the outer verandahs, upon which one of their four sides is entirely open, and composed solely of lacquered pillars;—it is the light of long deep sheds, of market-houses. The interior apartments, still more mysterious, open into the outer ones with like series of colonnades, and receive from them a still more attenuated light;—they can be closed at will by bamboo screens or blinds of extremely fine quality, the tissue of which rivals moire in transparency, and which are swung to the ceiling with enormous tassels of red silk. These inner chambers communicate with one another by some sorts of porticoes of unusual and unimaginable forms: sometimes perfect circles through which you pass erect as if walking through a huge cat's-hole; then, again, more complicated forms of aperture,—hexagon or starshaped. And all these secondary openings have borderings of black, which are relieved with perfect elegance against the general gold-tone, and are reinforced at all the angles by ornaments of bronze, marvellously chiseled by the metal-workers of long-ago.

The centuries also took it upon themselves to embellish this palace, by gently veiling the brightness of things,—by melting down all those golden wholes into a sort of very soft effacement;—with all the silence and the solitude, you would say this were the enchanted dwelling of some Sleeping Beauty,—princess of some unknown world, in some planet different from our own.

. . . . We pass before the tiny interior gardens, which according to Japanese customs, are always reductions in miniature of very savage scenery. Unanticipated contrasts in the heart of this palace of gold! Here again Time has passed,—tinting with green the little rocks, the little lakes, the little abysses; crumbling the little mountains; giving a look of reality to all that is liliputian and factitious. The trees—made dwarf-trees by some Japanese process of which I do not know the secret—have not been able to grow any bigger, but they have assumed a look of extreme old age. The cicas have grown many-branched, by reason of becoming centenarian;—one might take them for queer little palm-trees with multiple trunks,—antediluvian plants; or rather for massive black candelabras, whereof each branch should bear at its extremity a fresh tuft of green feathers.

What also proves a surprise is the apartment chosen by Taiko-Sama himself, who was a great conqueror and a great emperor. It is very small, very simple; and it looks out upon the daintiest, the most cunningly conceived of little gardens.

The reception-hall—one of the last I am shown,—is the most vast and magnificent of all. About fifty meters

deep, and, naturally, all in gold lacquer,—with a marvelous upper frieze. Still, no furniture; nothing but those lacquered shelves on which the great lords laid their arms as they entered. At the further end, behind a colonnade, is the platform on which,—at the already remote epoch of our own Henry IV,—Taiko-Sama held audience. . . . Then one thinks of those receptions, those entries of glittering lords, whose casques were surmounted with horns, with monster-crests, with splendid horrors,—all the unheard-of ceremonial of that court. One dreams of it all; but one cannot resurrect it all very well, even in fancy. Not only is it too far back in time; but it is too far back in the echelonning of the races of the Earth,—too far outside of our own conceptions, and of the hereditary notions bequeathed us about things. So is it also in the old temples of this country; we see without comprehending clearly; the meaning of the symbols escapes us. Between this antique Japan and ourselves, the differences of first origin have hollowed a vast abyss.

—“We are going to pass through another hall,” the bonze says to me; and then we follow a succession of corridors leading to the palace-temple.

In this last apartment there are people, which is quite a surprise—all the previous halls having been empty; but the silence is just the same. Persons are squatting down all round the walls, busy writing;—these are priests copying prayers with little writing-brushes, on leaves of rice-paper, to sell them to the people. Here, against the gold background, all the designs represent tigers—royal tigers little larger than nature, in all the

attitudes of fury, of waiting to spring, leaping, coaxing, or sleeping. Above the motionless bonzes, they lift their expressive and wicked heads, showing their sharp tusks.

My guide bows on entering. As I am now among the politest people in the world, I deem myself obliged to bow likewise. Then the salute rendered me in return is continued all round the hall; and we pass through.

Corridors encumbered with manuscripts, with whole bales of prayers;—and here we are in the temple. It is, as I supposed it would be, of great magnificence. Walls, vaults, columns, all is in lacquer of gold;—the upper frieze represents foliage of enormous poppies in fullest bloom, carven with so much delicacy that you would think them ready to fall to pieces at a breath, and shower themselves down in golden rain upon the pavement. Behind a colonnade, in the more sombre part, are the idols and the emblems,—in the midst of a heaped wealth of holy vases, perfume-burners, and lamp-stands.

It just happens to be the hour of the holy office (Buddhist cult). In one of the courts a bell, with deep counter-bass tones, begins to toll with extreme slowness. Bonzes, in robes of black gauze with green surplices, make a ritual entry, of which the passings and repassings are very complicated; then all crouch down together in the centre of the sanctuary. There are but few faithful present;—only two or three groups, that seem lost in the vastness of the temple. They are women, who stretch themselves on the mats;—they have brought their little smoking-boxes with them, and their little pipes;—they chat in whispers, stifling evident inclinations to laugh.

Meanwhile the bell commences to toll more rapidly, and the priests make great reverences to their gods. Still more quickly peal the brazen vibrations; and the priests prostrate themselves with faces to the earth.

Then in the mysterious further region something takes place which seems to me to much resemble the elevation of the mass in the Roman cult. And the bell outside, as if exasperated, rings with quick strokes, in an uninterrupted and frenzied way.

I think I have now seen everything in this palace. . . .

THE DREAM

THE DREAM

Reprinted in "LE LIVRE DE LA PITÉ ET LA MORT."

I

WOULD that I knew some language apart, in which the visions of my slumbers might be written! When I attempt it with ordinary words, I can manage only to construct a sort of clumsy, heavy narrative, through which those who read me can certainly distinguish nothing;—I myself alone can still discern the fathomless abyss that lies behind the *Almost* of those accumulated words—

It appears that dreams,—even those which seem to us the longest,—have scarcely any appreciable duration,—lasting only during those always exceedingly-fugitive instants when the mind is hovering between waking and sleeping; but we are deceived by the excessive rapidity with which their mirages shift and succeed each other;—having seen so many things pass by, we are accustomed to say: "I dreamed all night", whereas in reality we were only dreaming for the space of a minute.

II

The vision of which I am about to speak could not have had an actual duration of more than a few seconds,—for even as a dream it seemed very short—

The first image lighted up two or three times, by faint sudden starts,—as if some one behind a transparency, were turning up the flame of a lamp by little jerks.

. . . . First, a vague gleam, of elongated form, fixes my attention, at its immediate emerging from the deeper sleep,—out of night and nonentity.

Then the light becomes a band of sunshine, entering by an open window, and spreading itself upon a flow. At the same instant my thought growing more excited, suddenly becomes uneasy: there comes a vague remembrance of I know not what,—a presentiment, rapid as a lightning, of something which is about to stir me to the uttermost depths of my soul.

It becomes defined: this is a beam of evening sunshine, coming from a garden upon which the window looks out,—an exotic garden where, without having seen them, I know there are mango-trees. In that luminous band upon the floor, the shadow of a plant, which is outside, begins to outline itself and tremble softly,—the shadow of a banana-tree. . . .

And now the parts relatively dim before, begin to light up;—in the penumbra, objects begin to take form,—and I see all, with an inexpressible thrill!

Nothing but what is very simple, nevertheless: a little room in some colonial house—walls of wood and straw-chairs. Upon a bracket, is a clock of the time of Louis XV, whose pendulum ticks imperceptibly. . . . But I have already seen all this;—and I am conscious of my inability to remember where;—and my being struggles in agony behind that sort of tenebrous veil which is extended to just a given point in my memory,—there arresting the gaze I desire to throw far beyond it,—into I know not what remoter distance—

. . . . It is surely evening: this certainly is the golden glow of a sinking sun,—and the hands of the Louis XV clock mark the hour of six. . . . Six o'clock of what day lost forever in the eternal gulf of time,—six o'clock of what day, of what forgotten year?

Those chairs have a quaint look. On one of them is lying a broad white straw hat,—a woman's hat, of a form out of fashion for more than a hundred years. My eyes become fixed on it; and the strange unspeakable thrill moves me still more strongly than before. . . . The light is fading, fading: now there is hardly more than the dim light of common dreams. . . . I do not understand;—I do not yet know: but in spite of everything I feel that I have been familiar with the things of this house, and the life belonging to it,—that more melancholy and more exiled life of the colonies of long-ago, when distances were vaster and seas more unknown.

And while I am looking at that woman's hat,—which is fading out of sight little by little, like everything else there, into twilight grey,—this reflection comes to me, seemingly made within my head by some one not myself: —“Then, *she* has come in.”

—In fact, *SHE* appears. *She*, standing behind me without my having heard her coming;—*she*, remaining in the dimness, in the further end of the room where that gleam of sun does not reach;—*she*, very vague, like a drawing made in dead colors on a ground of grey.

She, very young, Creole, bareheaded with black curls arranged about her forehead in some antiquated fashion; beautiful limpid eyes, — having the look of wishing to

speak to me,—a mingled look of sad surprise and childish candor;—perhaps not absolutely beautiful, but having the uttermost charm. . . . And then, above all, it was *she*! She,—*elle*, a word which is in itself of exquisite sweetness to utter,—a word that, taken in the sense I comprehended it, sums up in itself all the reason one has for wishing to live, and expresses almost the ineffable and the infinite. . . . To say that I recognized her would be an expression utterly commonplace and feeble: there was much more than that!—all my being seemed to rush to her, with a profound force, but as though fettered,—to draw her to me, to recover possession of her again;—and in that impulse there was, I know not what—a sense of dumbness, of frightful stifling,—like the impossible effort of some one who should seek to recover possession of his own breath and life, after long years and years passed under the covering of a tomb. . . .

Usually, any very strong emotion felt in a dream is enough to break its impalpable threads, and all is over;—one awakens: the frail web, once broken, floats a moment; then sinks back,—vanishing the more quickly the more the mind strains to reach after it,—and disappears like some gauze torn apart in a void, which one would fain pursue, but which a wind bears away to inaccessible distances.—

But no;—that time I did not awaken, and the dream continued,—darkening;—the dream prolonged itself into a sort of fading trail.

For a moment we so remained before each other, and almost without thought; only inter-crossing our phantom-

gaze with astonishment and a delicious pain. . . . Then our eyes also became veiled, and we became yet vaguer shapes, — accomplishing insignificant and involuntary things. The light still continued to decline: scarcely anything could now be perceived. She went out, and I followed her, into a sort of vast salon with whitened walls,—barely fitted up with the simplest articles of furniture—after the ordinary fashion of apartments in a planter's house. Another shadow of a woman who was waiting for us there, clad in a Creole robe—an aged woman whom I recognized also at once,—arose at our approach, and we all went out together, without having made any agreement about it,—as if merely obeying a habit. . . . *Mon Dieu!*—how many words and how many long phrases to explain all this—which had no real duration, and which took place quite soundlessly between persons diaphanous as reflections,—lifelessly moving through a dimness ever deepening,—more colorless and more confused than that of the night!

We went out, all three, in the twilight, into a little dismal, dismal street, lined with low colonial cottages under great trees:—at the end of it, the sea, vaguely divined: an impression of being far away from home, of remote exile, and as one must have felt during the last century in the streets of Martinique or Réunion, but minus the great light,—all things appearing only in that penumbra wherein the dead live. Great birds were circling in the heavy sky:—in spite of the obscurity, one felt conscious that it was yet only that still clear hour which follows sunset. Evidently we were performing an act

that had become a habit with us: in that ever deepening gloom, which was not the gloom of night, we were once again taking *our evening walk*. But these collected impressions always continued to fade: the two women were no longer visible;—there remained of them only the sensation of two light gentle ghosts walking beside me. . . . Then, nothing more: everything vanished forever in the absolute night of true sleep.

* * *

I slept a long time after this dream—whether one or two hours I cannot say: at the first return of thought, upon awakening, I had that sort of interior commotion which makes one give a start and open one's eyes to the utmost. . . . In my memory I found again, first the vision itself at the moment of its greatest intensity,—that in which I had suddenly thought of *her*, on recognizing her large hat thrown down upon that chair, and in which *she* had suddenly appeared behind me. . . . Then slowly, little by little, I was able to recall everything else,—the precise details of that apartment *already known*,—that older woman half-seen in the shadow,—that walk in the little deserted street. . . . When had I seen and loved all those things? I searched rapidly through all my past, with a kind of uneasiness, with anxious sadness, *believing myself sure to find out*. But no, nothing,—now here! nothing whatever in my own life at all resembling it.

III

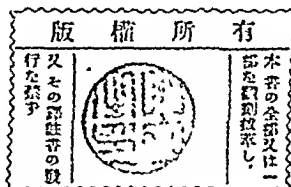
The human head is filled with innumerable memories, heaped pell-mell together,—like the threads of intertwined

skeins; — there are thousands and thousands of them pressed away into dark nooks out of which they will never come again: the mysterious hand that moves and turns them over, sometimes takes the most tenuous and intangible of them into the light of one instant, during those calms which precede or follow sleep. That one which I have just told of, will certainly never reappear; — and even should it reappear, some other night, I could never learn any more concerning that woman and that place of exile, because there is nothing more, doubtless, in my head relating to them: it is only the last fragment of some broken thread which must stop precisely where my dream stopped; the commencement and the continuation existed only in other brains long since returned to dust.

Among my ancestors were seamen whose lives and adventures are but imperfectly known to me; and there are certainly, I know not where, in some little colonial cemetery, old bones which are the remains of the young woman with the great straw hat and the black curls: the charm which her eyes had exercised upon one of those unknown ancestors was puissant enough to fling a last mysterious reflection even to me. . . . I thought about her through one whole day, — with so strange a sense of melancholy!

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